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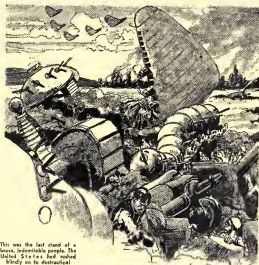
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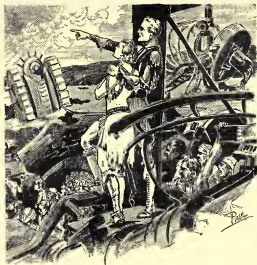
by ARTHUR J. BURKS

THERE were no lights whatever. There was no sound save that of Hell Boaring Creek and the wind that came down from the plateau. These drowned out the murmurs and the breathing of all that was left of the Central Army under General David Haslup, who had taken cover in the Creek's tremendous valley.

It was almost inconceivable that David Haslup, twenty-five years of age, was a general. Two years ago he had been a second lieutenant. His sky-rocket to

power was one of the least of the grim changes in the once United States. Two years ago there had been almost a hundred and fifty millions of people in the nation. Now no one knew exactly how many. Guesses placed the survivors at less than a million. The brain reeled with the thought of the dead.

General Haslup's "command" numbered fifteen hundred men, women and children. There were six hundred real fighting men, the oldest a stripling compared to Haslup. As for the women,



they too were fighters. In the holocaust of the last two years every human being who could walk had fought—and most had died, brave or cowardly, according to his lights. There was no longer any liaison between the various units of what had once been thought an invincible army. Haslup was not sure but that his tiny group, covering there in the Valley of Hell Boaring Creek, might not be all that were left.

And he was sure of another thing: none would surrender. That had been decided before the recent manifesto of the ruler of the invaders, before even the Central Army had started its retreat through the Rockies. Remembering that retreat, David Haslup shuddered. He felt as though there were oceans of blood upon his soul, yet knew that he could

not have saved it, that some other general might not even have got this far at all. The bulk of the Rockies were to the west; to the east the plains stretched away, plains which had known the sagas of his people.

He could almost see through hills to the Little Big Horn, where Custer had made his last stand. He smiled grimly. Had Custer, dying, even dreamed of such a hopeless last stand as this? Custer's last stand had been that of a small portion of a great military service. This was the last stand of a brave, indomitable people. Every one of them might die in the next heartbeat of time. For the ferocity of the invaders, many as the waters of the sea which had borne them from Asia, were skilled in mopping up. It seemed that not even the angels could

One of the leading present-day science-fiction lurid, thrilling vision of the devastation and rebirth

writers points a vast canvas, to give you his own of the greatest notion the earth has ever known!

outwit them.

Again David Haslup shuddered, remembering the retreat through the hills, along the dizzy defiles, of the Rockies. He remembered dropping bombs, which had smothered the faces of the apes and rocks with blood and brains. He remembered marching into a great, silent pot-hole in the mountains, where there seemed nothing but peace—and where bullets from a thousand edges of ravine had poured into his troops, piling them deeply dead on the soft green grass that had turned red with their lives. He didn't remember how they had got through, unless the Mongols were merely playing with them, amusing themselves.

HAD it not been so dark, the girl whose soft breathing he could hear in the darkness to the right might have seen the sturdy figure of the young general straighten, as though he had crossed some mental Rubicon. His black eyes were thoughtful, his keen intelligence alert. He had learned to think fast, like the darting of a bullet. That's why he lived when so many others were dead . . .

"It is hopeless, David!" said the girl softly, putting a hand on his arm. "This is the end, then?"

"It is never hopeless, while there is life, Mara," he whispered back. "And nothing ever ends. It merely changes. But I keep thinking . . ."

"Of the great mounds of our dead, being buried? Of the defiles choked with corpses? Of the stench of our lost loved ones?"

"Yes, of all these things, and of tomorrow. There is always tomorrow, you know, while there is life. Recount for me, to aid my courage, Mara, the true state of affairs as we know it."

She hesitated. She did not believe in opening wounds. Yet what did it matter, when all life was a bleeding wound that promised never to heal. Then she shrugged. Perhaps he had his reasons. His whim was, to her, a divine command, not because she loved him—which she did—but because the hope of this remnant of a great nation rested on his young shoulders. She dropped her hand from his arm, lest she feel him tremble as she spoke.

"Every American city is in ruins," she began. "New York, Chicago, Los

Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle. First, the enemy, with bombs, shells, bullets, grenades. Then ourselves, as we retreated from them, destroying everything of value that was left, so that the winners should inherit only the scorched earth, finding even it baked with fire so that it would not live again for years. Then, into the open country, where one could see the falling bombs, even if one could not avoid them. A great holocaust, my David, almost beyond comprehension, certainly inexpressible in words. There were so many things. Dallas and Fort Worth, where the enemy experimented with disease-germ bombs—and the dead swelled and burst in the streets the next day. El Paso and Phoenix, over which the gas clouds hung for hours. Their streets were empty when the clouds lifted. The gas had removed even the stains their blood might otherwise have left. The buildings were gutted. The windows were like sightless eyes, symbol that the United States rushed blindly on to destruction . . ."

"It was an error then, Mara, that we did not surrender, eighteen months ago, when the foreign commander insisted? At least we should have saved the lives of millions!"

"To what end, David? Slavery? What else would there have been? Nationalization of our women on the altars of the invaders. Labor in chains for men until they died of it . . ."

Mara faltered a little, and David knew of what she was thinking: of the fair and lovely women who had, in spite of their own will to suicide, fallen into the hands of the Mongols. Their fate was more hideous than that of those who had died in Dallas, Fort Worth, El Paso and Phoenix. Their fate was a red veil of blood, dropped across the face of the sky.

"Our country is a desolation, a ruins almost complete," whispered Mara. "As far as we know we may be all that are left, and most of us are women and children. And tomorrow, or the day after that . . ."

"We, too, shall be dead," said David Haslup. "Unless . . . unless . . ."

There was swift hope in Mara's interrupting whisper.

"Unless, David! You would not use the word unless some plan had come to you. What is it? Tell me!"

"It is so wild, so utterly impossible, that I hesitate even to mention it. But it was also impossible that any foreign nation, or all of them together, could invade and possess the United States; that a hundred and fifty million people could be slain so swiftly, so easily, so inevitably. But, it happened, impossible though it was. So even this may be possible. For the last week I have thought it. It has been this thought of mine which guided our retreat through the Rockies. But now that we are here, close to the goal I sought, it seems puerile—like the dream of some writer on the absurdities of the distant tomorrow, which no one can know."

"TELL me then, David," Mara was breathless, almost. He looked down at her in the gloom, but could not see her face. He did not need to of course, for it had been with him since he had first seen her—when the retreat through the Rockies had just started. That retreat! It couldn't have happened without the indulgence of the enemy; yet it had! It was a miracle that had lasted for a week. And if that miracle were possible, what of this thing in David's mind?

"I must marshal my thoughts, Mara. It is a dread thing. It is an irreversible step. It is a man against a moving mountain. A handful of heroes against the invaders' millions . . ."

"It is David against Goliath of Gath!" There was a sudden, vibrant, tilting quality in her voice, something that filled David Hadup with new courage, wiped away some of the hopelessness, made him strong again. Never before had she compared him to his first namesake, and his nominal heritage had not once occurred to him, because about him there was no room for vanity at all. In this only was he different from other great commanders, who strutted through life and death as on a stage. They were dead; he lived. Maybe that was the difference between them, vanity.

"It requires a deliberate sacrifice of many of those who yet remain," whispered David, agony in his voice. "A sacrifice of some that others may live, and continue on in the struggle for ultimate victory."

"Victory!" she repeated. "Victory? You speak of victory!"

"Not in our time, nor yet our children's time, nor yet in the time of their children's children. Our refusal to die shall be the torch we pass on to them. What, Mara, did that manifesto say?"

"That His Imperial Highness, Prince Ita, commanding the armies of the enemy, by direct decree of his father, is bidden to leave no American-born human being alive in the conquered land. He has lost patience with our defense. He is angered at our policy of searching the earth ahead of the feet of his conquering soldiers. None of us will be left alive . . ."

"And capture, tonight, tomorrow, two days hence, is certain! Then, destruction! So, this thought of mine, even though it involves depletion of some of our number . . ."

"Tell me, David!" she whispered. "Tell me now. What are a few of us, when all are condemned to die? Isn't it better to die for a purpose, fighting the enemy to the last, than to die with our faces to the muzzles of enemy rifles, our eyes—those of the men—gazing past the rifles to the shame of the women who are allowed to live on for a little while?"

"Yes, yes, of course," so David Hadup, as man had done from time immemorial, figuratively rested his head on a woman's breast for comfort and courage. "Then I shall tell you. Where, if we had the power and the courage to escape, would we go? Into the sea in submarines? No American submarine has existed for eighteen months. All rest at the bottom of the sea. Into the sky? Manifestly impossible. Where, then, where we won't be hunted like rats and destroyed one by one, two by two? In any direction on the face of the compass and the earth is there a chance for safety? No! Up! No!"

Mara gasped. "You mean, David, into the earth? Into the deep holes of the mountains, like blind moles? But the holes, over all the land, will be searched. Every opening to a tunnel . . ."

"There shall be no opening that any Mongol scientist can find. When we go into the earth we go for all our lifetimes, perhaps for generations."

"But light by which to see?"

"Delicate instruments may trace lights to their source. For a time, long or short, there will be no lights. There will not even, perhaps, be sound, until we are

sure that nothing human can hear it!"

He expected her to be afraid, but there was a *th* in her voice instead.

"And there, wherever 'there' is, we shall grow strong again, down the generations, down the ages, until we can again possess the land of our fathers! There, after—when shall it be, David?—tonight, perhaps, we shall find a new life. We shall shut out the horror behind doors of granite. We shall forget if we can, if the years are long enough. But you spoke of sacrifices!"

"THE enemy know there are remnants of our armies. This one. Another further south, perhaps in the Valley of the South Fork of the Shoshone, under the Absarokas, if any survived. Others still further south, God willing, others still further north. We do not know for sure. If they still survive, they can know nothing of us. Now, Mara, if the enemy comes seeking us, and finds no living thing no matter where he seeks, neither above nor aloft, nor in the midst of lakes or streams, what will he think? Where will he seek us? There will be but one place to seek! The depths into which we have gone! Do you see?"

"Yes, David, yes! They must find some to destroy, and thus be convinced that none remains alive! It is horrible, ghastly, terrible . . ."

But she broke off, unable to find words to express it.

"I will move downstream, Mara," his voice was choked, "and you will move upstream. For four hours we shall talk with the remnants. Let each group draw lots in its own way—who shall live, who shall die. Let the victors and the losers abide by the drawing. Then return to me here. Let them also decide who shall lead the survivors into the depths."

Mara gasped. "But it is your plan, your idea! Who else could carry it through?"

"Nevertheless it shall rest in the desires of our people. I shall abide by the will of the majority. So shall you. And one thing more, Mara. Weeks ago I would never have mentioned this. But this is a desperate time, when facts must be faced. It is a time for compassion, for the forgetting of ancient rules and traditions. What I have next in mind applies to the women. Those who go into the depths will be the mothers of a new race.

Would it be so terrible if those who lost in the drawing were given a last opportunity to live on, to be a part of this mad scheme, in the persons of their children? Let the women think of this with compassion, remembering that many of the men must die!"

Mara gasped, held her breath for a long moment. All barriers were down this night between David Haslup and Mara Carlin. In the eye of his mind he could see her lovely face, there in the darkness, looking up at him, a question in her eyes.

"And I, David! If one of the losers . . ."

"If we both survive the drawing, Mara," he said, trying to keep the harshness out of his voice, "we have months, perhaps years, ahead of us. Let us think only of tomorrow, closing our thoughts against the shadows of tonight. But know this, Mara: from the moment I saw you the world contained but one woman, had never, really, contained another! We sacrifice so little, you and I; they sacrifice their lives. And our abnormal necessity is both absolute and justification."

Mara kissed him. They separated in the darkness, David Haslup, moving across the rocks that bordered the howling stream, hid several times under trees as enemy planes droned over, searchlights playing upon the sides and precipices of the valley. Bombs dropped; guesswork he knew, but deadly just the same. Also those planes meant that somewhere to the west, near or far, enemy columns were cautiously advancing, playing their game of cat-and-mouse, seeking the last of the Central Army to its destruction.

David spoke with this man and that, this woman and that, this group and that. Men, women and children must survive. Men, women, and children must die. It broke his heart to find that even the small children could understand, that all were willing to take their chances with sure destruction. With this spirit, he thought, we cannot fail ultimately, though generations may come and go before success.

He lifted his eyes to the black ramparts of Chrome Mountain, and beyond it to the plateau, Hell Roaring Plateau, which rose twelve thousand or so feet above the plains of Montana, and thought:

"Is it destined, that mountain, to be the birthplace of a new race?"

Down was just lighting the sky when

all was finished, when at last those drawn to survive had been selected, those to die had accepted the luck of the losers. David Haslop did not know whether to be glad or sorry that he, by unanimous vote, both of the winners and the losers—and who could say yet which group had won or lost!—had been elected to survive, to take upon his shoulders responsibility for the remnant's tomorrow.

THE losers prepared, there in the valley of Hell Rearing Creek, to die behind their weapons. The winners, behind the broad tent back of David Haslop, moved up a ravine to the north of Chrome Mountain, to the mouth of a tunnel hidden by overcroppings and brush—a tunnel of which David Haslop had long known. For, several years before, he had been one of a group of scientists who had mined there, going deep into the Beartooth, seeking lost pages in the history of mankind.

The losers had needed little impediments with which to die. The winners carried the rest on their backs. David Haslop, with the hand of Mara Carlin in his, led the way into the tunnel, then halted until all the others, silent, moving like frieze-figures across the dawn of Creation, walked past him.

"There is no detritus outside, Mara," whispered David, "because the man who opened this place, long ago, made sure that only those he trusted should find it, and he trusted few!"

"Those four ones whom we left . . ." began Mara.

"Forget them!" he said harshly. "They are already of the past! Far back in the tunnel, where it makes its first turn, there is a plunger, and an electrical charge. When we touch it, we entomb ourselves for an endless time in this mine, burying the mine-mouth, the ravine by which we reached it, even channelling the Creek, with a mighty avalanche which I fervently hope the enemy will explain by their own bursting bombs, dropping on those who die to let us live!"

A hit of light came from the dawn, entering the mouth of the mine. He saw her face, exalted as with some inspiring secret. His face was grim as he led her back, both listened to the dying feet of those who had preceded them. Then, David Haslop found the plunger, hesi-

tated, pressed it down.

The mountain shook. The mountain rumbled. The earth stirred in its sleep. But only the first sound was heard by the entombed, for the avalanche closed away everything behind a wall of complete silence, utter dark.

They were never to know how the losers died.

II

THE flickering light of a single torch played over a column of blackish stone, deep in the heart of the mountain. It played over the face of David Haslop, and Mara Carlin, beside him, and over the faces of the survivors of the world's bloodiest conquest. David Haslop held the torch, spoke softly.

"This marks the end of dramatics," said Haslop, "and of a kind of saga that affected even our speech—before we closed the door of this place behind us. Look at this black column, and note the figures set in its face. They are fossils, and the reason the original owner of this excavation was so careful of his secret. A family of primates resembling man, caught millions of years ago in some great cataclysm, held here since by the rocks. So you see, even in this we are not the first. There is a lesson in these fossils. They tell us that man in his history has gone through many vicissitudes, faced dreadful dangers, undergone heart-breaking migrations. We have no inkling of this man's past. We know, if science knows anything, that the rock which holds this group was laid down over sixty millions of years ago! Yet, even though it is in stone, it survives, in a way. We, too, shall survive. But let's get everything straight . . ."

He paused for a moment, as though to marshal his thoughts. His eyes went from face to face, searching each for fear, not finding it.

"No use telling you our case is desperate," he said quietly. "It has been desperate for two years. Now, perhaps, there may be a chance. It depends on us. This cave constitutes our world. Those of us now living may never see the sunlight again, nor the stars, nor the moon, nor the face of the earth. We have, as

a basis on which to begin, the weapons—which we shall not need—and the implements we brought with us, our hands, and our brains. We have the bodies of women on which to beget children to carry on after we have gone. We have oxygen enough for the moment. The man who opened this mine was a little crazy, thanks be, and thought he might some day have to hold it against the attacks of scientists trying to rob him of his discoveries. Therefore he arranged some system by which the air is renewed. How good it is I don't know, yet. Perhaps this smoking torch means the death of us all, though I doubt it. Therefore, in a few moments, I shall extinguish it until we know. Now, here is what we have to do. We must find a way to sustain ourselves. Somehow we must procure food. We must have light and warmth, places to live, allotted to families. The idea of family must be revamped, incidentally, for there are four hundred women gathered here—fifty men. Don't be startled, for history merely repeats itself. Polygamy is not new to humanity. Men and women must put their minds to work, first, on one important thing: food. The plateau above us is a hunting ground, where there are elk, moose, deer, bear—but they might as well be on the moon. We can regard them only as symbols to fan our hatred of the enemy—for the enemy, in peace, will hunt them down. They are forever lost to us. Then, when the matter of food is settled, other things. Light. Increasing the size and comfort of our habitation. Sanitation. Medical care. Water. Finally, contact with other groups like ourselves, if any survive. And through it all, one thought to guide us—eventual destruction of the enemy, or the descendants of the enemy, who hold our land. Remember this, all of it: this cavern is our world. It is up to us to widen our own horizon down here, to make way for our own increase, to maintain a kind of civilization, to progress . . .”

He glanced again at the still faces of the fossils in the rocks.

“It is as though, by some great cataclysm,” he went on, “we had been hurled backward millions of years into the past of man. Only, we take with us our present-day civilization. Let us make sure that we keep it, build it, increase it. Let us not despair, for in that direction—we become the moles we somehow, at this

moment, resemble. Now, a period of thankfulness for our survival, a prayer to God. Then we think on our situation. The calendar of a new race is born this minute, was born when the mine-mouth closed over us. We know the date. We begin with it. Watches will be kept synchronized. By the time all we have are worn out, we will have others. We have ration enough with us to last for several weeks, but even so we go on a starvation diet . . .”

MARA thought, listening to him, that he must have planned all this with the beginning of the last retreat, when every person under his command had been forced to carry all the provisions under which he or she could stagger. Now these were the stores of a new life. The past was dead. The future was literally a blank wall. They had only the present.

“And we never cease from work,” continued Haslop, “until we are sure of a reasonable security. Now, in a moment, I extinguish the light. Perhaps the darkness will inspire some of us to find a way to light the cavern, a way that will not betray us to the enemy. One other thing: this mine is many years old. It is inconceivable that we are the only living things in it. Creatures of many kinds must have come in from the mountains. Hunt for them. All must be saved, increased — for everything that lives becomes food. Rats. Mice. Reptiles. Rabbits. Hunt for these things. The job of hunting will make all of you familiar with the confines of the mine. It is larger than you think. There are branch tunnels. There were many in my time. There must be many more, for the erstwhile owner labored here with his men until the invaders came. For three hours you are left to yourselves. Then return here to report what you have found . . .”

Without further ado, he extinguished the torch. The odor of pitch pervaded the area about the column. For a brief moment David Haslop thought he could still see the ancient faces in the stone. Then he realized that the darkness was absolute, to all intents and purposes. A soft hand came into his, a soft voice whispered his name.

“David,” said Mara Carla, “we’ll make it somehow, I know we will. For we’re still alive. We’ll stay alive . . .”

"The enemy may find us, at that, darling!"

His fingers played over her face, seeking for him now that his eyes were useless. For how long this sightless seeing might last he did not know. But the odor of pitch hung quite too long about his head, filling him with doubts. If there had been a circulation of air . . .

Maybe, when he had closed the mouth of the mine, he had destroyed the original system of air circulation. If he had it was only a matter of hours when every person in the place would die. That could not happen; fate would not be so utterly unkind. Yet had fate been so kind to America during the last two years? Weren't these people fighting against the inevitable? Had they not been destined, with the beginning of the invasion, to follow other lost races into eternal oblivion? David Haslop gritted his teeth. He would never accept that.

There were whispers, rustling sounds, among the others. Footfalls sounded along the black corridors of the mine. Now and again someone stumbled and fell. People stumbled against one another in the ebon immensity, and several times there was hysterical laughter.

"Hear it, David?" whispered Mara. "Hope is never lost while people can laugh. Why, in a year . . ."

But she made an end there. Already it seemed to her that they had been here for ages. The past was almost as dim as her own first recollection, already. David laughed.

"There are certainly compensations. We don't have to worry about fire or floods, snow or rain, heat or cold. We're snug here, anyhow. We must take care that it doesn't make us soft. In that year you mention all of us will be white as beeches, unless we take every care. There is a doctor, I believe, and I myself have some knowledge . . ."

As he talked he led Mara with him. They felt out the extent of the mine. Midway up the ravine north of Chrome Mountain, between the Creek and the Plateau, a paleontologist whose name would one day be revered because, indirectly, he had fathered a new race, had bored into the Beartooth Range to a great distance—two miles or more, as David recalled. When his miners—all dead now, with their master—uncovered the family of primates, Carter Lucky, the

paleontologist, had feverishly sent off branching tunnels, seeking for other groups, for other pages from the past. What he had found David did not know; but that he had made a habitation for the remnant he knew, and was thankful for the fact.

"Future generations," said David, walking through the dark, "will bless the name of Lucky. He will one day be a god, worshipped for his divinity . . ."

David laughed. "I knew him as a hard-swearing, tobacco-chewing, wife-stealing, conscienceless old man, who said that the mountains kept him from growing old. To my knowledge he was several times a father at seventy-five. He was a hellion, but, such is the way of men, he will be a god when you and I are forgotten. Mara, do you know, I am beginning to regard this venture with enthusiasm."

"I," said Mara, "am with you. That is all that matters to me. I am unconcerned about the future, as long as it is in your hands. I know that the others feel the same way."

SHE said nothing of last night. He asked her nothing. Last night was part of the dead past. The losers of last night were dead by now. He looked at the visible dial of his watch. Yes, it was ten of the morning, and none, now, would be left alive. Here, with David Haslop, as far as he knew, was the American nation.

"There must be central gathering places," he was saying, trying to keep a certain enthusiasm out of his voice. "There must be places for sleep. There must be eating places. There must be places to look away the dead . . ."

The dead! For a brief moment a ghastly thought came to him. In spite of himself he gasped, shut off a cry of horror.

"No, my darling," whispered Mara, "it will never come to that. In that march we are above the group in the rock, surely."

"But who of us knows what hunger will do to us, Mara? It suggests the beginning of tribal law. Any who destroy the happiness of others must die. No, there are too few of us! The rebel must work, for a stated time, for the good of all the others. There will be no death sentences, because we can't spare a per-

son. You and I always, Mara, will be together . . ."

"If there were only marriage, David," she whispered. "Maybe it's foolish, but I . . ."

"Let's be engaged," he said, "until someone finds the secret of a light that will not use up our oxygen. Then, before all the others as witnesses, we shall marry by mutual agreement . . ."

"There are eight women for each man," said Mara, something of hysteria in her voice. "If any of them . . ."

He took her by the shoulders, there in the dark, shook her gently. "There is a duty for the men," he said. "Perhaps there will be no need of me . . . in any case, let this be known, darling. I love only you, will never love anyone else . . ."

David broke off suddenly. They were traveling down a corridor which the others had not yet encountered. A sudden current of cold air had played on David's cheek. His ears, keened by the darkness, he thought, had caught a dripping sound. Pushing Mara softly aside, he fumbled over the side of the corridor, found yet another branching off. Together, almost running, they went into this, following the sound of the water.

"In some fashion or other," said David excitedly, the close walls slanting the words back at him, "this current of air will be fanned into the cavern. Here is one necessity of life, Mara!"

He stumbled, almost fell. His foot went into icy cold water. He slid into it up to his knees. For a ghastly moment he thought he was plunging into some water-filled, bottomless pit, taking Mara with him. But his foot struck bottom. Mara did not slip into it with him. He bent, feeling for the edge of the pool. It was fully ten feet across, two feet deep. There was a constant dripping of water from the roof. He put his hands on the wall beyond the pool. Water flowed over both hands, into the pool, as though the face of the rock were sheeted with it.

"Not David," he whispered to Mara, "but Moses! And here we have another means of life! It is an omen, Mara, a good omen."

He dipped up water in his cupped hands. It tasted of rust, and for a moment his disappointment was keen, until the taste reminded him of something: rust was metallic, indicated iron, and where there was iron . . .

THAT reminded him, too, that across the ravine by which they had reached the tunnel—their footprints now buried under tons of rock and rubble — was Chrome Mountain. If the Mongols knew of it, they would use it themselves, and the remnants would not dare. If they did not know, the mountain might provide them with many things.

David Haslup stepped out of the pool. He took Mara in his arms, because his heart was too full for words. He held her for a long time, until she said:

"Rules or no rules, there has to be a fire now, and you've got to get dried out. You'll catch your death of cold!"

David Haslup whooped with laughter. Who could blame him, even in the face of the two-years horror, when that horror had been wiped out as though it had never been! Here, now, a race had begun. It had an inheritance, but it closed its mind to memory.

Only for a moment, as Mara led him back toward the column of fossils, tacitly accepted by them all as the central-meeting place—which Haslup was already thinking of as "Central Plaza" — did Haslup think of what the enemy could do to them if, by some chance, they found the way by which oxygen entered the cavern, and filled the way with deadly gas—or simply closed the way!

III

THE first general search of the man-made cavern produced little of value or interest, though it did accustom the inhabitants to the mine's layout. And stumbling and feeling through the dark gave them something to think about. So David Haslup said nothing of his discovery of what appeared to be a permanent supply of fresh air until they all gathered again about the column in Central Plaza. The way of their returning was strange, exemplifying the humor of most of them, their ability to see amusing things, even in the pit. For as they came fumbling back through the dark they felt for the column, their fingers telling them when they had found it—and none who got back first helped the later ones by so much as a spoken word. David Haslup would remember, as long as he lived, the fright-

ened breathing of some of the women, the whispering sounds their hands made across the fossils. It would always be part and parcel of their beginning in the cavern.

They had found nothing of importance, save their own way about the place. Now Haslop told them of the oxygen, which needed only circulation to supply all their needs, and torches—compounds of wood they had brought into the place with them—were lighted again.

Someone was reminded of the Vestal flames, and a man was given the task of making sure that a central light always burned at the feet of the fossils. In any other circumstances the eerie light cast on the incredibly ancient faces would have been gloomy in the extreme. But just now it seemed to them all that they were the first man and women, discovering for the first time that there were stars in the sky above their heads.

"It is the beginning," said David Haslop softly. "Shortly, if our minds are sufficiently inventive, there will be a lighting system for the entire cavern. And you, George Blake, are to make a sketch of the place—and here and now names are to be selected for each of the corridors. And we must have a name for this place . . ."

There was a general murmur of approval. Various suggestions were offered. Someone said it should be called the United States, which struck the others as ridiculous. Then Mara Carlin suggested Sanctuary, and Sanctuary, by acclamation, became the name for the cavern. The United States was a place in which they had all lived, to which they or their descendants would one day return—victoriously. Meanwhile, this was home, where they could find comfort as they might.

"Everything we can possibly need should be found in these mountains," said David. "The problem is to find it and bend it to our use. We are working for the present as well as the future. We are prisoners here, in a way, and those of us who know the outside will probably always regard the Sanctuary as a prison. Those who come after us . . ."

His voice trailed off. It was the first suggestion of hopelessness since the entry, and Haslop made haste to correct it.

"The torches," he said, "will last just so long. There is no way of replac-

ing them. But there is coal in the hills, and some of the corridors may perhaps show traces of coal. It becomes a race then between the eternal burning out of the torches and the finding of coal. Seatter and do what you can—and this time, search in earnest for any living thing that may be found in the Sanctuary."

He had a rough idea of the Sanctuary himself now, thanks to his trip through it with Mara. He assigned men to the tasks of exploring in detail, each man to be accompanied by women to assist him. Children tagged along. Few of their fathers were with them. Husbands and fathers had gone the way of other Americans, and only by chance did any families remain even partially intact. David, when the searchers had left, looked into Mara's face. There were traces of tears on her lids. He merely stared at her, and she fought to keep them down. She remembered, under his gaze, as he intended she should, that hut for the Sanctuary every man here would now be dead and the women, shamed and mistreated, would not be far behind them.

"We'll make out, darling," he told her.

"If you'll always call me darling it will help," she whispered.

Cries, laughter, rang through the Sanctuary. Mara looked apprehensive.

"There is slight chance of the sounds being heard outside," David told her, "and sound makes it seem a little like home. After all, few of us have had any idea of home for two ghastly years."

PUT in that light it wasn't so bad. Besides, those cries might mean discoveries of inestimable value to the new "nation" below. With lights to guide them there was no guessing what the inhabitants might find. David and Mara sat, waiting, while behind them the faces of unbelievable antiquity looked down on them. Once Mara looked up at those faces and shuddered.

"They might have been caught in the rocks, just as we are," she said. "And we may . . ."

He put his hand over her mouth. He didn't care to hear it. He'd been thinking the same thing—and of the millions of years during which the fossils had seen nothing save oblivion, and rocks pressed hard by the mountains them-

selves, against their faces. He thought, wildly, that further investigation might bring to light implements these ancients had used, but knew it was wild. There would be nothing.

The inhabitants began to come back with their discoveries and their captures. Women had overcome their natural repugnance to rodents, and carried chilled mice in their hands or their lifted dress-fronts. One woman had found a nest of squirrels and a store of nuts. Several different kinds of snakes had been found, among them three specimens of the deadly rattler. These were carried glacially. In mess-pans men carried many different varieties of grubs and worms and crawlers, and laughingly reported that there were many more in the corridors.

"I'd die before I'd eat any of those hideous things!" said a young girl.

"Your ancestors ate them," said David calmly. "And our biblical forebears ate locusts and honey. If you're hungry, you'll eat, I'm sure. Though there doesn't seem to be any honey."

"There are mud puppies in the rust-flavored pool," said a youngster. "I don't know whether they're good for food . . ."

And so it went, as each reported his findings. Men were assigned the tasks of preparing places to keep the captures from running free, and to look after them. And as David had indicated, one far corridor projected into a bed of coal—a fact which had caused Lucky to come work in that corridor.

"We'll burn out the coal," said David promptly. "It will serve a two-fold purpose. Where the coal is taken out for burning, we'll brase with rocks from the Sanctuary as we enlarge it. It will provide several pretty problems for us. Fire, and what uses we can make of it for cooking, for metal work. The coal gas will be a problem, too. Maybe we can find some use for it, some way of dissipating it. In this connection great care must be taken that the bed itself does not take fire. Now, if no one objects to my continuing in command, I will assign work. Women must do their share with the men. This place must be made livable as soon as is humanly possible. After a brief meal you will go to work. When you hear my signal whistle, you will come back here for assignment to quarters. I be-

lieve this will be our last meal picnic-fashion. Our stores will be overhauled and inventoried at once. Then, we eat. Anything resembling clothing will be divided equally. You must all have realized by now that the clothing we wear at the moment will not last long. Plans must be made against certain nakedness tomorrow. It may even be advisable to save our clothing, for comfort during periods of relaxation, by beginning at once to go naked while we work . . ."

It was significant that not one woman gasped her consternation at this. They were all ready to take their chances with whatever might develop.

They ate from cans, savoring every mouthful. In the mind of each was the thought that this food must last them until they could wring more, literally, from the heart of the mountain.

"Any of you with scientific bent, women included," said David, "will remain with me. We can't start too soon on what we must do . . ."

He made his assignments. Two men and three women remained behind as the others left for work, advising him of their scientific knowledge, and that they already had ideas which might help to make the place livable. One, a metal worker, had already selected a far corridor in which he proposed to open shop, as soon as the first supply of coal came in from the workers.

"For what is coal?" he asked softly. "It is composed of plant-life. There may be a way to salvage all of that life, somehow. If it will still burn, it may still provide food. Certainly its heat will be valuable to us when we are ready to make implements for mining and improvement of our lot here."

"I've been thinking of the insects, sir," said one of the women. "and it strikes me that if I could find some way to increase their size, beyond anything ever attempted in any laboratory . . . well, who knows? A small grub that turns the stomach may supply delicious food when its meat can be taken off in slabs as big as buns!"

THERE was a disposition to laugh, but David Haslop did not join in it. The woman was in earnest. David believed that something might be done about it, and said so.

"If the battery by which you exploded the charge that covered the tunnel mouth," she went on, diffidently, "is still good . . . well, maybe I can do something with it. Maybe I can find a way to keep it charged. Maybe I can use it as a model for others."

"One trouble with that," said David, "is that electrical impulses may reach the enemy."

The woman, one Nellie Horner, shook her head.

"This mountain is probably full of electrical impulses of one kind or another. There must be plenty of radio-active elements. Maybe there's radium. Only time and investigation will tell. While we're enlarging the Sanctuary we may run into many things we can use. There must be hundreds of uses for coal, for instance, that we never dreamed of while we were outside. It wouldn't surprise me if we found we could clothe ourselves with it—for all I know, in white garments! I've given it plenty of thought. Don't forget what George Washington Carver did with the humble peanut!"

The woman's simple statements opened vast vistas to the imagination of David Haskup. He felt then that his own job would be to coordinate and direct, rather than to create, but the urge was in him to dig and claw at the mountain, to make it give up its secrets for the comfort of his people.

When he dismissed his little coterie of scientists, he went over in his mind his people's possessions. Rifles, bullets, grenades which the "loose" had not needed. Knapsacks, canvas, khaki, mess-gear, canned goods. Trench knives. Bayonets. Clothing—was there any way clothing could be used that would be more to the general welfare than use as bodily covering? To what use could empty tin-cans be put? How could their small stock of medicine be replaced?

By nightfall—it would be a long time before any of them could think in any terms save those of day and night, though they were destined to live out the rest of their lives in the night-darkness of the Sanctuary—the first supply of coal was brought to Central Plaza.

There a pit was dug and a coal fire built. One of the youngsters fitted up a strange kind of reflector, composed of such mirrors as the women possessed,

combined with the lids of mess-pans, which cast an eerie glow over the solemnly silent inhabitants of the Sanctuary. It was dim orange in color, and covered the walls with their grotesque shadows.

But they could look into one another's faces, and what David Haskup saw in those faces, calm with unrelenting courage, was good to see.

Men were assigned areas in the corridors and main tunnels which were, temporarily, to be their homes, and for whose care they and the women who fell to their lot were responsible. Women were allotted in the fairest way David could think of. Mara prepared a roster of men and women, each roster alphabetically arranged. To each man eight women were assigned. Mara called off the man's name, after which she called off the names of eight women. The men offered no protest. The women shifted about, grouping themselves around the men to whom they were assigned.

"Changes can be made if experience shows these assignments to be unhappy," said David quietly. "They are not to be regarded as irrevocable. Contingents will now repair to their quarters. I have no instructions about conduct for the men, leaving that entirely in the hands of the women, who are sufficiently numerous to handle the situation, I think! But one thing I ask the women to bear in mind: we cannot afford quarrels—yet. I look to each—well, call it family group—to police itself."

THERE were determined expressions on the faces of the women. David felt almost like laughing, save that he knew that this was neither the time nor the incident for laughter.

"Family groups," each with the children belonging to mothers in that group—the division of children being thus naturally taken care of—repaired to their quarters. David and Mara were left alone before the stone faces that had peered so many millions of years out of their beds of stone.

David and Mara had selected the main tunnel for their own. Thus, in effect, it became "Headquarters."

They placed their blankets together, because they were meager and the stony floor of the Sanctuary was hard; they kissed each other goodnight, softly, and

their arms were across each other's bodies as they slept, that first night, in the birthplace of a new nation.

But wheels whirled in the head of David Haslap as he slept. He saw the wheels plainly, and they were made of smoothly polished granite, and by four and four they were fixed to box-bodies made of softer, lighter stone—and in his sleep he could hear the gentle rumbling of many strange four-wheeled vehicles, swiftly traversing the tunnels and corridors of the Sanctuary, driven by man-and-woman-power in the beginning, later by some silent power rapped from the mountain itself. At first their travel was slow and laborious; later their speed was dazzling, and efficient.

He awakened once in the middle of the "night," and almost heard the rumbling in very truth—because his brain told him that it was possible, that it would be done.

There would be too much work for despair; the Sanctuary would hum with activity.

Softly he kissed Mara as she slept, thrilled when her lips answered his kiss, and slept again.

IV

WITHIN a week, with the help of Mara, David had learned all he could about the background of each of his subjects. Each of them, it developed, either by experience or education, possessed special personal knowledge not known to the others. He proposed to make this knowledge available to all the others knowing that knowledge of any sort, like the germ from which the tales of dreamers spring, could be expanded, adapted, used.

Every "day," before the intense manual labor began which was absolutely necessary to life in Sanctuary, there was a general meeting at Central Plaza, under the cold eyes of the fossils. David himself began the long series of lectures, his first being to tell his people all he could remember about Paleontology as he had experienced it here in the Beartooth Range, under the aegis of Carter Lucky. He told his people of the ores that could be found here, if his people were diligent.

He spoke of copper, silver, gold, chrome, all within reach—if they were all willing to labor prodigiously. He likened their work to the cleaning of the stables by Hercules, and emphasized that each person who heard him must become, as far as humanly possible, a modern counterpart of the legendary hero. He told them what he knew of mining, its dangers, its triumphs. He poured out his specialized knowledge to the limit, as an example to the others. Nowhere did he make the mistake of differentiating between men and women when it came to ability.

For the next lecture he called on a man at random, and this one rose to speak haltingly of foods, their preparation, and how they might possibly be wrested from the mountains.

Another had been a good farmer, knowing well the elements of fertile soil—all of which were now locked in the rocks which were the home of this lost people.

A woman frankly discussed obstetrics, and the problems of giving birth which they must inevitably face. Another man discussed medicine, insisted that no medicine used outside but could, if the right way were found, be produced here.

An expert in metals and the work of the forge gave forth all he knew.

An anthropologist told them stories of past races, from Atlantis to the recently destroyed United States, thus giving to their own experiences a potentially epic quality filled with inspiration. No catastrophe through which they had gone, or might go if—by some cataclysm—the mountain were to close upon them, could surpass or be more terrible than the sinking of Atlantis, for instance, and the destruction wholesale of a civilization, a people, a continent. Their continent, at least, seemed safe from destruction. History, was the theme of his discourse, was but repeating itself for not even history recorded the number of times. Out of every catastrophe of the past, races had somehow survived, if only in small remnants, like this one, which slowly built themselves back to their places in the sun.

"Place in the sun" was an unfortunate phrase, but no one caught the man up. None here ever expected again to see the sun.

Mechanics rose and talked, and in their very lectures informed David where they best fitted into Sanctuary's future.

Women who had been clerks, secretaries, dress-makers, even courtesans, had their place. So, after each lecture—and never a "day" passed that one was not given—groups fell into place naturally, and the backgrounds of men and women were forged into inviolable weapons for the attack on the future.

"You must labor as you never thought to labor," was the tenor of David's instructions to them all. "You must labor until you are about to fall exhausted. Then, somewhere within you, you must find the strength to continue. For our lives and our future depend on that."

So order came out of what, in the hands of someone less practical and far-seeing, might have begun and ended with chaos. And lecture by lecture, the army which attacked the Sanctuary increased, as each person fitted more snugly into his proper place.

David himself realized, almost at once, that the pool which did not run over must have an outlet of which use could be made. That somehow or other it must drain into Hell Roaring Creek—which flowed so swiftly down the valley below them. He set women to finding this outlet, enlarging it. He hoped in this way to dispose of pulverized detritus by sending it out into the stream, where it might be carried away without leaving trace enough to excite the curiosity of the Mongols.

ONE man, whose business had once been air-conditioning, applied himself to the task of seeing that the air in Sanctuary remained fresh and pure. This one worked like a Trojan.

Jan Schmidt, the metal-worker, took charge of his own particular niche in one of the corridors, where he labored like Tuhai-ekin over a forge he somehow built with the rocks themselves. The expert on air-conditioning solved the problem of blowing up his coal flames, of leading away the coal gas. . . .

Work on enlarging the Sanctuary began at once. Obviously there was no use for the tunnel by which they had entered, and material taken from the enlarging process was packed tightly into this, beginning just inside the area of slide. Thus, with each rock rolled into place, they shut off the world the more, and lifted harder barriers against the enemy. And in moving rocks taken from the

deeply buried walls they learned many things. They learned how to make tools out of rock, how to make levers appropriate to the place and the circumstances, how to use fulcrums and where to find them. They found new material for making rollers, pries. The work of many men and women, pushing larger and ever larger rocks into the main tunnel, made David think of ancients who labored on the pyramids, of the blacks who raised the Citadel in Haiti for the ruthless Christophe. Yet work, for them all, was an anodyne which gave them no chance to think.

Women, to David's smiling amusement, dictated whence the rocks should be taken, in order to leave openings which should become family dwelling places that would please them. And that the family group plan was taken as a matter of course could be seen in the definite building of separate rooms for each of the women. The women themselves, after the manner of women down the ages, wanted everything shipshape. Such pitiful pretties as they had, they used in decorating their homes. With hard stone "polishers" against softer stone, they managed to give their places the unmistakable feminine touch by rendering harsh outlines less harsh, by hiding somehow surfaces against which nothing now possessed would avail.

An expert on lighting worked hours on end, without pausing to sleep, in an effort to light the Sanctuary in a way that would not burn up oxygen, and that still would serve. He began by taking apart the hands of a wrist-watch and analyzing, with the aid of a chemist, its elements. Then he sought through the Sanctuary for supplies of those elements which might be used for general lighting—the idea being to avoid electricity. Now and again, as he progressed, he explained to David what he did—and it was good.

But almost a year passed before he was wholly successful, and during that year the inhabitants of the Sanctuary moved, for the most part, through an eerie gloom, scarcely brightened by the dull glow of Harmon Black's—the expert—experiments in lighting. But one day he had it, and the Sanctuary became almost as light as day, for at the end of each corridor there glowed a subterranean sun of huge proportions, while each "house"

was supplied with a small replica of one of these suns.

David applied a curfew law that covered the faces of the bigger suns at a certain hour every night. The smaller suns did not come under this law, for the Sanctuary folk had learned to counter-balance rocks in the doors of their homes and when the doors were closed, what went on behind them was no concern of the general public.

The chemists, and those who were rapidly developing into chemists through necessity, found that amazing things could be produced from coal. They discovered clothing—of a sort—before the last rags the inhabitants had brought with them from outside had fallen from them. The women saw to it that this clothing was passably becoming.

A central bathing place, in a cavern dug off from the pool David had first found, was the Mosaic of them all, once each day, by community law. Here men, women and children bathed, stricked, enjoyed themselves. From the first commonsense made nudity unworthy of comment. There was a healthy quality about the business of removal of clothing—and therefore to the dissipation of any mystery regarding the form of any of them. Clothing was worn for its own sake, for the protection it gave bodies while they worked—and, perhaps, behind closed doors, where clothing might become the bait of the coquettish.

THERE were women who had been midwives, and these watched all the others with expectant eyes. When, the very first time, it became certain that a child was to be born in the Sanctuary, a child who had never seen the sky, perhaps never would, it was a signal for general rejoicing. The prospective mother was the concern of every man and woman and child in Sanctuary. No question that any child could ask was put aside. Mysteries about grown-ups that puzzled children were mysteries only until their questions could be answered—and age should give them the right to discover more definitely for themselves. Nothing that anyone did that might conceivably effect the welfare of the whole was hidden from the whole. People who advanced that welfare were commended before all the others; people who, mistakenly or otherwise, offended the public

taste, were publicly reprimanded according to the degree of seriousness of the offense. This, for a long time, was the only punishment necessary—for the culprit could not hide or sulk, but was a prisoner with the others, the butt of sarcasm, the butt of quick sympathy and understanding when he or she fell into line.

The main tunnel was packed tightly to the edge of the first corridor, and the "Business District" of Sanctuary had been greatly enlarged. And now a new problem developed. Where could the rubble go from further excavating? And since those mechanically inclined had anticipated this problem, the problem was quickly disposed of.

The leader in this project had, long ago, been an engineer on the Grand Coulee Dam, where conveyors had been used to handle rock, sand and gravel. Pooling his knowledge with that of experts in kindred and allied subjects, conveyors were contrived. From the coal again, this—a substance that, when it had passed through the increasingly numerous crucibles of Jan Schmidt, resembled asphalt except that it was rubber-pliable.

The first of many conveyors was run by man-power. It was an endless conveyor, traveling over rollers contrived from the hardest rock available in Sanctuary, operated by windlasses at which men bent their backs and rippled their muscles. Rock taken from new diggings went into a crusher—also the invention of Jan Schmidt—and out of it onto the conveyor, thence along a shallow tunnel paralleling one of the corridors, and so into the outlet of the pool, which plunged somewhere away into the heart of the mountain.

For months after this apparatus was put to work David Hadup waited anxiously for a dread result. If the detritus thus sent forth appeared too thickly in Hell Roaring Creek, and on its banks, some Mongol geologist might trace it to its source—especially if the powder contained traces of color.

So, Jan Schmidt, before the stuff went into the vent, passed it through a process of his own designed to gather any gold that might be found. This was carefully checked when the rocks were dragged out of the mountain, too.

Months passed and the inhabitants of the Sanctuary remained undisturbed.

The woman, Nellie Horner, who had asked for the battery which had closed the entrance to Sanctuary, had taken over the problem of food. She worked as nobody else in the place did. She never seemed to need sleep. She was almost a fanatic on the subject. She used everything. Traces of roots thrust down through the rocks from above. Infinite study of the possible by-products of coal. She, of them all, knew she was racing against time—against the absolute consumption of every conceivable thing had brought into the Sanctuary with them. She overlooked nothing. She studied the silt in the pool, the rocks throughout the Sanctuary, any new rocks encountered in the city building. But she concentrated on coal.

And on a certain "midday"—the one time during any given twenty four hours, when the whole population was together for food, when problems could be discussed and neighbor be kept in close touch with neighbor, and David could study faces for any signs of disaster or despair—Nellie Horner stopped David when he would have eaten of the meager rations to which they had been reduced.

"Try this, David, instead," she said calmly.

IT was a grayish pellet, no larger than a man's thumb. Surprised, a little in doubt, he swallowed the pellet—first looking a question at Mara, who smiled and nodded, as though she were in on the secret—and almost instantly he had the sensation he had almost forgotten—that of having enjoyed a full meal. One swallow, and he had eaten to repletion.

"Nellie! Are there more? Have you solved the problem, then?"

"Yes. The soil of Montana and Wyoming is produced by erosion from these mountains, for the most part. Therefore I began with the assumption that all the elements to sustain life—which we usually receive indirectly through plant and animal food—could be found in the Sanctuary if I hunted. I found them. They are all in that pellet. My first one was as big as a man's head!"

The others, about the great circular table below the fossils—a table of smoothly polished stone, lighted by one of the artificial "suns" set over the heads of the fossils—looked at Nellie Horner's rueful face and burst into peals of

laughter. They could imagine her handing such a pellet to David Haslop and suggesting that he swallow it.

"Fruit and vegetables and meat, all are in that pellet," she said calmly, when the laughter had subsided. "Now, it becomes a matter of wholesale manufacture—and I think it is a simple one. It can be done by the formation of a committee charged with the job of providing all the elements." She smiled suddenly. "From this pellet as a starter, we can even provide desserts! All the delicacies and preserves we've hungered for and haven't had . . ."

"That reminds me, Nellie," interrupted David, "of all the crawling things we've found in the Sanctuary from the day we entered to now, and which have been turned over to you. You had hopes of enlarging them, I remember, and feeding us with their flesh. What's become of them?"

"I destroyed them, each by one, and stole their internal secrets, their secrets of life. Without them that pellet wouldn't have been possible. We now have no need of them that I can see at the moment, though every living thing hereafter encountered should be turned over to me, as there is, probably, no possibility of exhausting by-products."

Then Nellie Horner gave a lecture, though this was not lecture time. She had used the lime left in the rocks by the bodies of sea-creatures buried there countless ages ago. She had separated coal into its component parts. She had extracted secrets from roots thrust down by trees from somewhere atop the mountain. She had probed the minutest secrets of the rocks—all kinds. The granites, the igneous, stratified and metamorphic rocks, the birds-eye porphyry.

The pellet was the result. It was just a beginning.

When the Sanctuary realized the full purport of Nellie's success, that she had, probably, pushed possible starvation far into the future, she was applauded to the echo.

"We probably owe you our lives, Nellie," said David when silence reigned again. "It seems ridiculous to discuss any sort of reward. What can we give you? If we had rubies, diamonds, emeralds, what would they mean to you, or us? If we could fill your house with gold it would merely be a nuisance . . ."

"No, for I could do great things with gold, not as a medium of exchange, but chemically. Incidentally, at the far end of Schmidt Street"—corridors had now been named throughout the Sanctuary—"in the facing, there is gold. It becomes more apparent as we proceed that it is the beginning of a rich vein. I can use that, but not as payment, for the betterment of all of us, if Jan can smelt the gold."

"Ja," said Jan Schmidt, "that can I do, Nellie, any time you wish it! I can smelt, melt or burn anything!"

He had, in the past, almost proved this literally, for into his fire went the refuse—for which no use could conceivably be found—human and otherwise, of the Sanctuary, its gases being sent out through vents in the cavern.

"Then we can only give you our heartfelt thanks, Nellie," said David.

"No, David, I can be paid, and in coin that may enrich us all."

HE elevated his eyebrows in surprise. "But how?"

"I want," she said simply, "a son to follow after me. I want him now, so that he will grow up before I am old, and I can teach him all I know now, and have learned by then, before I die."

"But that, Nellie, should be simple. You are part of the household of George Blake . . ."

"In name only, David," said George Blake, grinning. "She hasn't made a fuss about it, but there you are. I've an idea she knew what she wanted, from the very beginning. I didn't figure in it anywhere."

David began to get a hint of what was coming. He jerked a glance at Mara, who met his eyes squarely. Mara smiled. He tried to read her eyes, seeing in them nothing but pride, understanding and love. He knew, though nothing had been said about it yet, that she was to bear him a child. Now . . .

"You've guessed it, David," said Nellie quietly. "I am not romantic. I have no time for love. I am too busy with my work. For that reason, and that reason only, I wish to pass on what I know to a child of my own. It is a simple matter, I think everybody will agree with me, costing neither of us anything especially. It is the only claim I will make on your time, affection or person."

It was typical of the commonness strides the Sanctuary had made that now those about the great table, selecting a spokesman by a meeting of eyes, stepped into the discussion—and that in none of it was there a single indication of ribaldry, confusion or license.

"There is no question of refusing, David," said the spokesman calmly.

David said, catching Mara's slight nod: "I shall be honored more than I can say, Nellie."

Nellie's sharp reply was typical of her. "Don't kid yourself, David. I'm probably the most ambitious, selfish woman in the Sanctuary. I'm asking for myself. That my desire means prolonged benefit for Sanctuary is purely an accident. That you appeal to me as the instrument is not accident, but a decision reached after studying every other man in the place as painstakingly as I have studied the rocks, and for much the same reason. If there were other men I might look further. Of these here you come the nearest to what I have in mind."

She had been too busy talking to partake of food. Now, with a gamin grin, she popped a gray pellet into her mouth, rose from the table.

Weeks drew on before David Hushup was entirely easy in his mind. But then he felt, finally, that Mara had taken it as a matter of course. Besides, she was busily preparing for the time when she herself would bring new life into the Sanctuary.

But other children came first, and with them startled realization of what their tomorrows might be like.

V

IN a manner of speaking the Sanctuarians continued their retreat. That is, they moved constantly deeper into the mountains, improving their habitation as they went. Their tread was north, east and west—north and east until David knew that to extend the city further to the east would bring that border of it too close to the outside, afterward north and west, where potential borders were, for all practical purposes, limitless.

In him there was a hope that would

not die. The hope was that other remnants had survived, and that in course of time the Sancturians would make contact with them. And to this end, further, when the lower levels, or "stories," of Sanctuary, had dropped below outside ground level by several hundreds of feet, he planned on excavating to the south, hoping to contact yet other remnants there. The project seemed almost beyond the bounds of possibility, as far beyond their powers as flight to the Moon or Mars had been beyond the power of Americans on the surface. But they had kept trying, rejecting, trying again, and so would he.

Progress on the building of Sanctuary seemed to travel with heart-breaking, soul-searing slowness, with a maximum of labor and a minimum of result. They seemed never, really, to get anywhere.

Then he awakened one "day"—actually now, the day underground coincided with a day aboveground, even to light and darkness—to the realization that the Sancturians had been underground for ten years! In the beginning, none would have discussed such a length of time. It would never pass. Yet it had, and The Entry had occurred but yesterday. He got to thinking, until by now it had become a habit, of The Entry in capitals. The Sancturians had, in effect, reversed the process of the ancient Hebrews. Theirs had been The Exodus. He supposed, in time, that The Entry would have as great a value in history, the history of the Sancturians, as The Exodus had had in the history of the Hebrews. History, repeating itself. You could scarcely go far wrong by working to the end, deliberately, that it should repeat itself.

What now, in the way of progress, could the Sanctuary show? David Haslup began to enumerate them. Some of them made him smile. For instance, the dismay of men and women alike when they discovered that, hidden away from the sun, their skin took on a grayish, sickly pallor. Immediately, browbeaten by the women, steps were taken to correct this. As a result, there was one vast "sun-room," lighted by "sun-lamps"—whose light came indirectly, and through millions of years, via coal, from the sun—to which those who desired it retired daily, to bask in the light, nude, and take on the tan they were afraid to lose.

David smiled as he remembered the grand opening of the sun-room. Yet it had been beneficial, if only psychologically.

Then what?

The Sanctuary was, roughly, five times its original size. To traverse it all afoot, now, was a long, fatiguing job. It was seldom done that way, save by walking enthusiasts who didn't mind long treks and many flights of steps. Most Sancturians preferred the speedy, silent elevators, which passed from level to level in the center of columns which upheld the series of roofs. One didn't have to walk far to find any elevator to any place he wished to visit. These lifts were run by eager young people, some of whom had come into the Sanctuary with the original band, some of whom had been born in the Sanctuary.

"Houses" were spacious and well furnished. Nellie Horner, now one of the foremost scientists, had taken bed-clothing, clothing, furniture, food, almost everything the whims of a housewife and her sister-housewives could wish for, from the very rocks. And Nellie's pride was her son, Carter, perhaps the brightest of the crop of subterranean-born. He resembled David closely, and knew that David was his father, a fact which he accepted without comment. Carter was Nellie's only son, whom she almost worshipped. His brain was lightning-swift, proof that when Nellie had made her selection she had known pretty well what she was doing. If she remembered the circumstances of Carter's conception and birth she gave no indication of it. She was driven by a very fever of industry, always.

MARA was the mother of six children, three boys and three girls—and Mara was quietly happy with them, for they compared favorably with the son of Nellie Horner. Mara undertook the education of them herself. She had had little to do in the progress of Sanctuary, not because she had no talents, but because David had not thought to set her any tasks save those of assisting him in the work—increasingly heavy and important—of coordination.

As a result of Mara's attempt at education, other women sent their children to her, almost automatically, to free themselves for their own labor—which

nobody had to tell them to do, because work had become a habit without which most of them would have pined away and died. If, now, any Sanctuarian desired a return to pre-war conditions outside, none mentioned it. Sanctuary had really and truly become "home" to them all.

Mara's work had now become perhaps the most important in Sanctuary, for she was preparing the inhabitants for tomorrow. David honored her requests for help, and whenever she desired it, experts in various lines were instructed to help her with the children. So, knowledge which the Sanctuarians had reached by the hard way, were drilled into the heads of the children.

Nellie Horner, without asking anyone, had quietly added the making of a history to her other labors—for paper had been, as a matter of course, one of her major projects. With the help of the others she had managed a printing press of sorts, which worked with amazing speed. Printing, copying, binding, became the labor of certain selected women.

Sanctuary had its first volume of history, and many volumes grew out of it. There appeared, as if by magic, books on metals, paleontology, anthropology—the three latter, especially, would have startled the world had they been given to it—mining, foods; books of fiction, with outside locales, against the day when the human mind had forgotten what the outside looked like; books of fiction with locales inside the Sanctuary.

After absolute necessities had been taken care of, all hands gave their best to producing luxuries that had been their's outside. The time was not yet ripe, but one day there would be motion pictures. There already were telephones. There would be television later. A strange, awesome adaptation of radio had been produced. No blaring loud-speakers filling the Sanctuary with advertising, but a teletype machine—a master machine connected up with other like machines, all through Sanctuary—which recorded matters of interest to the Sanctuarians, and by which the adults kept in touch with the outside world. Bulletins from outside told the Sanctuarians what was happening to the lands they had lost. No such bulletin ever accomplished anything save to fill those

who had been part of The Entry with white-hot fury. In the end they were discontinued, save in a central office where a committee, of which David was chairman, kept in touch with the outside. Now was no time to fan hatreds about which nothing could be done. Much time must still pass.

But when they thought of vandal feet in their erstwhile domains, of alien cities rising where their own had stood; as they thought how even the tombs of their people were being utterly obliterated, fury filled them to the exclusion of all else.

So, these bulletins were only taken when the committee felt that they were becoming too satisfied with their lot, and needed to be reminded of what they had lost.

Through the mighty masonry which separated the corridors now ran "trains," slowly but surely developed from Jan Schmidt's conveyors. The conveyors had gone deeper into the mountains, as everything that could be done with the first settled area was done, and pronounced good. These trains were constantly in use, taking Sanctuarians to and from their work. If some of them remembered New York and its subways, or the vast plains with their flyers, with nostalgia, they were too busy to give way to it. A good percentage of them, David knew, would have left the Sanctuary with far more reluctance than they had entered it in the beginning. They had literally put down their roots.

Children overran the place, for neither fathers nor mothers had shirked their responsibilities. The shrieks and cries of boys and girls rang endlessly down the corridors. And from the moment they began to show signs of intelligence, their education began. The population of Sanctuary had increased from four hundred and fifty to twenty-five hundred. Many of the youngsters who had been part of The Entry had mated and done their share to increase the population.

ONCE each month, as solemnly as mass in a great outside cathedral, the younger ones were gathered together to hear the story of The Entry. They listened to a psalm of hate against "invaders" they had never seen, and to most of them "invaders" was just a word without meaning. The monthly reading

—from a small book prepared by Nellie Horner—became part of Sanctuary tradition. The children listened with respect, as their parents, outside, had listened to sermons in churches, to dogmas in Sunday Schools. Church was held, too, on Sundays—and Sunday School was part of the lives of them all.

There had been a score of deaths since The Entry. Men and women had been killed by slides in the coal mine. Women had died in childbirths. Babies had been stillborn. There was a place, in the original area of Sanctuary, set aside for their ashes. Their bodies, as a matter of course, and because of the limits of space, were the first consideration of Jan Schmidt. Their ashes, in urns born from the fertile imagination of Nellie Horner, were sealed in niches in a vast granite wall, and outside the seals were the names, dates of birth and death, and any other matter that parents might desire.

There was space enough on this one, first-selected, wall, for the ashes of twenty thousand dead. When there were simply twenty, David Hasbup stood under the epitaphs and mused, alone.

"I wonder how many there will be there before we are able to attack the Mongols—take them by surprise. I wonder how many there will be there ten years from now? I wonder how many there will be here when it is my turn to begin my eternal rest?"

He was thirty-six years old now. Approximately half of his life had been lived. He had no fear of death. He even thought with something of pleasure, of leaving his ashes in Sanctuary. He had one dread: that the name of Mara Carlin might be there ahead of his. Without her, he knew, he would surely die. Even Sanctuary, with all its progress, its growing glory, would be empty if she preceded him.

He turned away, to find her standing beside him. Perhaps she read his thoughts; she often did.

"Let's hope, David darling," she whispered, "that death comes to us on the same day, the same minute of the same hour! Anything else, even thought of it, fills me with terror!"

David did not answer. Through the nearest corridors rang the musical cries of Sanctuary's playing children. They gave no thought to death. It was doubtful if, even in this corridor, they lifted

their heads to look at inscriptions as they played, or lowered their voices because ashes of their elders were so close—and eternally silent.

"Is our one ambition, return to the outside, the confusion of our enemies, safe in their hands, Mara?" he asked softly.

She did not answer. There was no need to answer.

Those children had never seen the sky. "Horizon" was just a word, and blue . . . well, there was sometimes blue to be seen in the flames of Jan Schmidt's crucibles, and there was all the blue they knew about that had any meaning.

There was a vague fear, deep within him, as David took Mara's hand, returning with her to the rather spacious "house" they shared with their children. Knowing that still another would come there to join them, before the year was ended, David wondered if, after all, he had not made a mistake, that night in the Valley of Hell Roaring Creek; if he had not made a mistake when he found the way for some of them to survive.

Then he shrugged, hating himself for his doubt; again, and overpoweringly, conscious of the happy cries of Sanctuary's children.

VI

NEVER for more than a few minutes of time, during all the ten years he had guided the destinies of Sanctuary, had David Hasbup forgotten all that had led up to The Entry. Mongols possessed the erstwhile United States. Yellow fevers breathed the air that for generations had known only the white. Alien feet trod the beloved soil for which his forebears had fought and died. Americans had conquered and made fruitful the soil; Mongols had, by conquest, taken the fruits of their labor, made useless their sacrifices.

Maybe, in a way, in taking back what Americans had wrested from the Redman, Asiatics but reclaimed their own—but Americans had remained for generations in possession, the required nine points of all law.

Therefore, David's hatred for the invaders grew with the years, was part,

always, of his moments of meditation. That his descendants might lose sight of their duty to the past, might become content with their lot, was almost unthinkable. A day of reckoning for the invaders must come. It scarcely mattered if it were delayed for generations, as long as it came in the end. It must never be lost sight of.

He couldn't remember when the doubt, the fear, had come to him.

But it was there, and he must do something about it. First, of course; he must wait until Sanctuarian children reached something approximating the age of judgment—until, in David's case, he could pass on to his two oldest sons, Carter Lucky Horner and David Haslop, Junior, what he had in mind. He was still young; there was plenty of time.

He allowed five more years to pass before he decided to begin their education in hatred and vengeance. Five years of effort, of progress, five years during which further amazing inventions developed in Sanctuary, and he watched the growing up of scores of boys and girls who seemed perfectly satisfied with the state into which they had been born.

Youngsters who had come in with the adults, during The Entry, were somehow a tiny race apart. Their memory of the trek through the Rockies must be even more poignant than his own. They must recall something of the outside. Yet their formative years had been spent in Sanctuary. They seemed to fit in nowhere—almost as though they were more alien than either the adults or the subterranean-born.

Mara gave David two more children. He had other children, by other women, in Sanctuary—through arrangements made by Mara for, she said, the public welfare—toward whom he did not feel the fierce parental devotion that he did toward those of Mara and himself and, in slightly lesser degree, his son by Nellie Horner.

There now were a hundred and fifty epitaphs in the columbarium. David had forgotten the census figures of Sanctuary, though they were around somewhere. He was forty-one, and felt like an old man, a patriarch, and knew that most of the youngsters so regarded him, after the universal manner of their kind. Sanctuary still expanded, solid on its foundations, safe under its mighty roof,

alive with people like a hive of bees, filled with comfort for those who deserved it because they still worked for it as heartily as they had from the beginning.

On a certain day, fifteen years after The Entry, he paid a brief visit to Nellie Horner.

"Nellie, will you send Carter to me this evening at eight?"

"Why, David, of course. May I ask why?"

"I wish to tell him, and Mara's first-born, the reason why all of us are here, what drove us here. . . ."

Her ready smile vanished. "And give them a dose of your own bitterness, David? You wish to, as it were, 'pass on the torch,' so that our children may be inspired to start a war some day with the Mongols?"

"That's it. Do you mind, Nellie?"

HER face brightened again. "I have never been anything but loyal to you in word, deed and thought, David," she said. "Now is no time to change. But, David . . ."

She paused, a worried frown on her brow.

"Yes, Nellie!"

"Whatever happens, David, do not allow it to embitter you further. Perhaps, in a way, life has passed you by here. Maybe you've changed a lot more than you think. All of us who came in with you most certainly have . . ."

"What are you trying to tell me, Nellie? That I may be disappointed in the reception my sons give what I have to say?"

"Exactly. They would never lack in loyalty to the leader of Sanctuary. But they have ideas of their own. They've been well educated. They retain everything they hear. And they have minds of their own. In more ways than you can imagine, because of their very backgrounds, they are incomprehensible to you. Bear it in mind, David. If you were too bitterly disappointed I should be heartbroken."

"You feel so strongly about me then, Nellie?" his voice was very soft.

"Perhaps you have noticed, David, that I have never looked at another man in Sanctuary."

Flustered, confused, somewhat terrified, David left her. He went to Mara,

reporting faithfully every word of the conversation with Nellie Horner.

"She loves you, David, if that is any comfort, with whatever love she has left beyond her work. If anything were to happen to me . . ."

He stopped her with a quick clasp of his hand.

Eight o'clock. Carter Lucky Horner and David Haslop Junior, strapping boys of fourteen, whose very appearance filled him with pride that dimmed his eyes, faced him across his own desk. For a long moment he looked from one to the other.

Then, as briefly as possible, trying to keep much of the hatred and bitterness out of his voice, he "passed on the torch." He told of the Mongols, the invaders with yellow faces. He told them again of the outside, where horizons were not restricted by stone walls, where stars and planets hung in the skies of day and night. He tried with all his eloquence, developed by years of inspiring Sanctuarians to greater and greater effort, to show them the world he remembered.

And he watched their faces as he did so, trying not to see the growing unbelief in their strong young faces.

"Not in your time," he concluded, "or even in the time of your children's children's children, will it come to pass. But the word must be heard here, and passed on in its turn when you have reached the age where life becomes more and more uncertain. Our lands outside, bounded only by the great oceans, must be regained. For generations you have but to be fruitful to full capacity, and multiply—but always the word must be passed on. Have you anything to say?"

The two stalwart boys looked at each other as though for confirmation of a silent, mutual thought. Then David Haslop Junior, clearing his throat, spoke softly, fearfully at first, then gaining courage as he watched his father's face.

"Can you really expect us to believe that our origin is as you have stated, father? Don't you give us credit for even the rudiments of intelligence? Why should we make war on people who, for all we know to the contrary, do not exist at all? How can we believe in them, and the harm they did you—as you say—when your story is coupled with so many other absurdities?"

David gasped. "Absurdities?" he re-

peated, choking on the word.

David Junior looked ahead him, then lifted a paperweight from his father's desk. It was a polished piece of bird's-eye porphyry that had been given the boy's father on his thirty-fourth birthday by Nellie Horner.

"YOU speak of stars that hang in the sky, father, unsupported. How can we believe this? Look! I drop this paperweight. Inevitably, surely, it falls to the floor. By no device we know can it be made to hang in midair. And what has our experience been, as far back as we can remember, in the matter of horizons? We try, with picks, mattocks and spades, to enlarge Sanctuary—and what happens? Do we ever come to any vast cavern, such as you mention, where there are no walls? No, we never do, and why? Because it is inconceivable that we should come to any opening beyond which, at any distance, no wall exists. Our intelligence tells us that no such vast space can possibly exist, for it must be bounded by something! Has it not been proved in Sanctuary, times without number? We have burst through into mighty caverns, but mighty though they were, there were always limits which we could reach by exploration; therefore it follows logically that no cavern is without measurable limit; that, then, this vast emptiness you mention is . . . shall we call it a dream, father? Not, father, that we question your faith in what must have been passed on to you. . . ."

David Haslop, his face purple, rose to his feet.

"Are you presuming to question my veracity? To say that what I have told you is not true?"

Again his two oldest sons hesitated, visibly unwilling to anger or hurt their father. Then Carter Lucky Horner answered.

"It isn't that, father. It's just that your faith is greater than ours. You believe because you have faith. We, the younger, more progressive generation, believe only what reason assures us is true. Perhaps your educational advantages were not as great as ours have been, father!"

"Are you trying to tell me," said David Haslop, with dreadful humor, "that I am passe, an old fogy?"

To his unbelieving horror his two sons,

after a swift, shamed exchange of glances, looked at the floor and made no reply.

CHAPTER VII

DAVID HASLUP sat in his Meditation Room, deep in thought. Once each week he went to the Columbarium to commune with his forefathers, and always before he went he spent a little time with himself, a period of conditioning through which the better to appreciate his own status in the stream of time. From this room, by pressure on a button, he could see any part of Sanctuary he desired, speak with anyone he desired, appear in picture form to any inhabitant. That he seldom met those most distant, in the flesh, scarcely mattered. One had not the time for close personal contact.

But just now he was unconcerned about the workings of Sanctuary. They seemed to go on without him, fulfilling themselves in a routine which had begun further back in time than any one could recall.

David was entirely alone. Not even his sweetheart was allowed to intrude upon him in the Meditation Room. He was alone with his thoughts. Soon he would go out through all the sounds, all the fevered activity, of Sanctuary, to the great Columbarium, there to renew his spirit, there to gather fresh courage from the brave ones who had gone before him along the stream of time.

But even in this it was difficult for David Haslup to be entirely still. Race was strong in him always, and his race had been one of swift, decisive action. There seemed at times to be even a kind of restlessness in the Columbarium, as though vanished souls were stirring in their eternal sleep, bothered by emanations from Sanctuary which offended their sense of the stress of things. It had been passed on to David that his task was to make sure that no such offense, ever should come to pass. And during his moments of quiet meditation in his own room, and later in the great silent halls of the Columbarium, he always felt that the spirits of his forefathers were very close, striving, through the invisible mists of time to advise him.

He rose from his throne-like seat of stone, moved to the huge rock door, pressed a button. The door swung silently open. David regarded it with appreciation, wondering by just what means the oldtimers had set it in its place, solid and sure against the passage of time.

He walked out and the door closed behind him. He passed along the Street of the Elders, where only those in power were allowed to walk, turning right into the First Ramp which led a few yards to the oldest Escala. There, on rollers as old as the doors, almost as old as the rocks themselves, moved the Escala, a smooth way of black that never ceased to move, and that was forever silent.

He stepped onto it and was whisked away as he stood. Once, according to the old books, there had been seats on the Escala, but these had undermined the stamina of the Sancturians and had long since been removed; so long ago that the footprints of men had rubbed out even the marks they had left on removal. Personally, David did not think there had ever been such seats. It would certainly have been known to the founding fathers that seats in public places were doomed to destroy the aggressiveness of the people.

He rode for ten minutes, deep into the Sanctuary, toward the Original Area named in the books, which the old tales said had been that first occupied by the Sancturians, and where David himself had found evidence that tended to prove that the Columbarium had once, indeed, been the abode of the living.

Great suns played over the stalwart figure of David Haslup as he passed the successive corridors. They were set at the ends of each corridor, to cast their beneficent light upon travelers. No one could remember their origin, and the old books had been obviously wrong in many instances with reference to them. Some, doubtless, of the facts had been either lost entirely or obscured by time.

He stepped out at the end of the Street of Mourners, and into the Elevator of the Elders, by which the ashes of the ruling dead were transported to the Columbarium. The elevator moved with breath-taking swiftness which never ceased to amaze David, that his people had built so well and solidly in their time. For by this way Sancturians

came the closest to the roof which covered all the Sanctuary, and so closer to the All, where everything was made plain—but only after death, beyond which the living could never intrude or inquire.

INTO the Columbarium, onto another Escala which seemed in itself to have about it the odor of antiquity, the hush of an ancient sorrow.

Thus, to the Columbarium of the Elders themselves.

A mighty, far-reaching place, the Columbarium, if one included in it the resting places of all who had vanished, by death, from Sanctuary. The mind literally reeled in an attempt to comprehend the actual number whose feet had trod all these highways and byways, and that now would never sound again through any save ghostly corridors.

He stepped off at last in the Columbarium of Haslup, and hogan, as always, with the first David Haslup. He had been far-seeing, that first Haslup, or amazingly vain. One could never know for sure. But one thing was certain: in the face of the square of rock behind which his ashes were hidden, a stone picture of the first David Haslup had been cut—according to the old books, by a woman, one Nellie Horner, doubtless one of the concubines of the first David Haslup.

To David Haslup it was always an eerie experience to look at that picture, for it might well have been his own. He knew that when he was an old man he would surely be able, if he wished to pose for another picture of the first David Haslup.

David lifted his hand in salute. "You were all right, oldtimer," he whispered, meaning no disrespect whatever. "You were a tough old bisonid—whatever that word may mean!—in your time, and I don't blame you if you found it necessary, in the name of the law and order, to tell a few harmless lies to your people. You must have had your hands full."

He moved on to the next David Haslup.

That one, the son of the first, might have been almost a twin brother of the first. A slightly different color to the eyes, perhaps, an inheritance from Mara Carlin, the man's mother. Rather mystical, on the whole, however. Sometimes

he wondered why Sanctuarians persisted in keeping these oddtimers as part of Sanctuary legend. Sometimes David was minded to open the rock vaults and see for himself whether there were actually human ashes behind the austere, patriarchal picture of his first known ancestor—whom Sanctuary legend credited as descended from the gods. Let the people think that, since it helped those who ruled them. It did no one any harm, and the intelligent could accept just so much of the legend as he wished, and no more.

He moved on to the next David Haslup.

To the next. Then, to the next, smiling a little, as always, when he realized how egotism had dictated to each David that his firstborn should bear his given name. It was strange, really, how egotism persisted. When David himself had a son, his name, too, would be David.

He would look like his dad, too, David thought proudly.

On to the next David, and the next. Their pictures—for the Horner family had continued on, their duties passing down from Nellie to her son, and after him to his sons, to the present—were carved in the doors of their final resting places.

There were ten David Haslups. David was the eleventh in line. And his pride in his ancestor was boundless. It wasn't difficult for him to believe that his people had supernatural or divine origin—else how had their mysterious power, their inheritance of command, passed on so surely, and inevitably, to the present day?

Of course the books probably didn't have the right answers, but where there was smoke there must be fire, and they probably had been built—the old theories—on a basis of fact. Some day, when he was old, he would take time to make research into his family's past. It was a huge family now, of course, for the Haslups had been prolific even into old age. Only the firstborn of each generation, of course, held power and command over the others. This, too, must have had its beginning somewhere.

David remembered the date of death under the picture of the first Haslup: 1996. The old boy had died at the age of eighty, and David grinned as he recalled the legend that the old chap had had four

posthumous children, all boys!

The date of death under the picture of David's own father, four years in the past, was A.D. 2498. Already, with the turning of the century, Sanctuary had expanded, grown, become more modern. David pulled out his chest a little, and thought:

"Even you, dad, would be amazed at our progress if you could come back, in this Year of Our Lord 2502 and see what changes have come about. I think you'd be proud of me, though the old guy at the far end would probably lift his patriarchal hands in horror at plenty of the things we are doing."

HE paused, rolled "Year of Our Lord" over his tongue again, trying for the thousandth time to understand just what it might mean. Mystical, abstruse words, probably, whose meaning was lost in the mists of time. A lot of mists of time could form, and he washed away in the air currents of Sanctuary, to form again, in five hundred odd years. One could scarcely envisage five hundred years. It was more difficult even than trying to imagine a time before one's own birth.

Before leaving the Columbarium of Haslup, David made a separate trip, as always, to the niches which held the ashes of the mothers of the family, with whom his spiritual communion was somehow, and incomprehensibly, closer. From Mara Carlin, the first, on down through all the mothers, gentle, determined, lovely faces looked forth. Those faces almost, usually, made him feel sure that his family was of divine origin. For their eyes were deep wells, filled with secrets, longings, hunger—and promise. And all had been found.

He would often talk aloud to the mothers, feeling that they somehow answered him. When he caught himself at it, he usually broke off, lest he inspire himself to believe, as most Sanctuarians believed, that they were, or had been, the repositories for the seed of gods from—where? There were tales about that, but hard to believe.

He left the Columbarium for a swift tour of inspection of some of Sanctuary, almost forgetting the Black Columbarium where the infamous were entombed—their rectangular niches unmarked by pictures, the plaques bearing neither

birth nor death dates. Sanctuary had cremated and interred the ashes of these, but had tried to forget them—as they, before dying, had known they would be forgotten. The first to be dishonored with a black plaque in the Black Columbarium had killed a brother Sanctuarian with a rock, over a woman. Silly on the face of it, since women were equal, and only fools contended for the favor of any given one. That, of course, had been long ago.

Another had tried to gain favors for himself by "cornering"—whatever that might mean, obviously having meant something horrible when it had happened, generations back—the food pellets of his country-folk.

Those two, and the other score or so in the Black Columbarium, had been fittingly punished. They had worked out their lives away from their fellows—who were forbidden even to speak their names, this last in order, among other reasons, that their offspring should escape the stigma of their crimes—growing old, inevitably to fill dishonored niches.

David always looked into this cold, ghastly place, for a reason of his own. It reminded him that he must never allow selfish considerations to interfere with his duty. For even he, David Haslup, might fill one of those niches, pictureless, dateless, to the end of time. There was, he had heard, a Haslup in there now, a family renegade, a black sheep—queer expressions, those oldtimers had had! Meaningless, most of them—and David knew that whatever tradition said about the divine origin of his forefathers, there was really little question that the current crop was human throughout. Thinking divinity, no doubt, through intercourse with Sanctuarians!

On, into Sanctuary, shrugging his shoulders to cast off the weight of depression a visit to the Black Columbarium always gave him. He could never forget that the face of the sun in the Black Columbarium had died long ago, as had the hopes of the men who had left their ashes in the dishonored corridor.

Out among the blazing suns, then, where Sanctuary was busy. And there, as though by prearrangement—though it was nothing of the sort, except that some mental communication usually

brought it about—he was met by Hela Dorn, whom he loved, who loved him—though both insisted that they did not believe in love, and were planning to mate and rear children scientifically and sensibly. They touched hands and foreheads, and David said:

"I've been to see them again, Hela. It always saps my strength, somehow. The past is so ponderous, so staggering, that it tires me. Come into a Restoring Booth with me. Do you feel the need of being Restored?"

SHE smiled brightly. That smile of hers always did things to David's heart. It made his heart jump and hammer. There was something divine in it, no question about about that. Hela was lovely, from the crown of her head—topped by hair that matched the brightest of Sanctuary's suns for color—to the soles of her feet. And she always dressed exactly right. Smooth fitting waist and bodies of the color of birds'-eye porphyry, to match her hair—both articles of clothing, in all consistency, derived from that rock—dress of sheening, polished, but amazingly pliable granite, shoes that managed to look neat and tidy despite their size. The size was necessary because in the soles reposed the substance which all but neutralized the strange property of Sanctuary—a property that forced any material body, however soft and fluttry, to descend from any height to the nearest solid depth. The history of the shoes of Sanctuary went back a long way, perhaps even back to Nellie Horner, who began to evolve the shoes from strange pieces of rock when a workman of her time, laboring high in the roof of Sanctuary, lost his balance and was all but dashed to pieces on the first solid body his hurtling form contacted.

Now, when one fell, one landed softly, easily, without hurt. Sanctuary certainly owed the oldtimers plenty, though of course succeeding generations had improved on everything they had done, and added some wrinkles of their own—which was only right and proper, since each generation should justify itself or, deservedly, perish.

Hela and David entered a Restoring Booth, closed the slender door behind them. Instantly a gentle, healing light poured over them, bathing them in its soft effulgence. This Restoring Booth,

for instance, was something the last three generations had developed. It did away, for all time, with a habit that had lasted for generations—unbelievable as it seemed. In the old days men and women restored themselves in a crude, disgraceful, shameless way—by opening their mouths and taking into them certain grayish pellets. It must have been horrible, long ago—during the faded days of Central Plaza and the common table—for people to have to look at one another's opening and closing mouths, and the lewd, libidinous habit of stuffing them with gray pellets.

This was much, much better. Here one was simply bathed in the light—which carried with it a soul-satisfying scent, not too strong and not too weak—and one was almost instantly replenished. Intelligence had dictated the Lights of Restoration to such an extent that there were no overripe, hothouse people in present-day Sanctuary—for the Lights never replenished them beyond exactly current need. People prone to hoggishness—another strange word from the oldsters—sometimes tried to trick the Lights, but never successfully. When you were full, which meant when you had, physiologically, enough and no more, no act or wish of yours could increase your restoration in the slightest. You could enter every Restoring Booth in Sanctuary, taking a lifetime to it if you wished, and gain nothing whatever for your pains—save only what your body used during your peregrinations.

David and Hela sometimes met in the booths for exchange of soft words, for handclasp, for kisses—absorbing restoration as they did so, seldom giving it a thought.

David grinned: "I understand, according to the old books, that during the godly days, in a place called 'outside', my first ancestor's people even took, by the mouth, huge chunks and gobs of repulsive material. . . ."

"David!" Hela's face was fiery red, her eyes big with shock.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Hela," he said, instantly contrite, "but I keep thinking that we are so close together, will so shortly mate, that I can say anything to you, even obscene things like this! You must understand, darling, that nothing I could possibly say could be disrespectful to you!"

"I understand, of course, David, but such statements from you are bound to shock me, though the same ones from any man about whom I care nothing would go in one ear and out the other. It's because, I suppose, I have placed you on such a high pedestal."

"You don't, by any chance, credit me with divine origin?" David grinned.

But Hela didn't grin. Her face was serious. "You mustn't laugh at the old tales, David. There might be something in them, at that, and when I think—which I sometimes do in unguarded moments—of your possible descent into some satanic Black Columbarium, because of your lack of faith . . ."

HE shut her mouth with a kiss, led her out of the Restoring Booth, where both had been miraculously—by all standards save those of Sanctuary—washed clean of all hunger, and the inspection of that portion of it closest to David's Meditation Room began.

Sanctuary was a mighty nation, forty miles broad at its narrowest part, by four hundred miles long and five miles deep. It was still growing, too—in every direction save toward that from which men, naturally, fell if they lost their balance. There was something strange about that, something that made David wonder, again and again, if there really were some power about which he knew nothing.

One thing had been accepted. It was obvious to anyone that nature, or fate, or design—or whatever one cared to call a queer destiny—did not intend Sanctuary to be extended upward beyond certain well-defined limits. Limits defined by awesomely arched, roughly beveled roofs. If nature intended man to go further than the limits proscribed by the first Elders as the "Roof of Sanctuary," why did nature cast man down from the high places when he presumed too much? Of course, man might go on, and there were fearless—or foolhardy—spirits who sometimes advocate a concerted attack on the mysterious, invisible substance which caused men to fall; but The Elders had always, in the past, sternly forbidden such nonsense, and subsequent Elders had followed in their footsteps.

Any attempt to go on beyond the "Roof of Sanctuary" was taboo. Nobody knew exactly what had originally

been meant by "taboo," but they feared it, whether they admitted it or not, and it wasn't difficult to hold them.

Far away, to the south, they had encountered other warnings, too. There was an area of vast heat, of savage, boiling waters, of hideous, roaring sounds. Maybe there, eventually, the souls of Sanctuarians were punished. Anyhow, there they were afraid, and there, in their extending of the limits of Sanctuary, they gave the area a wide berth. In the old books that area—how strange that the elders had been able to prophesy, obscurely, of course, that Sanctuary would eventually strike this area—was called Yellowstone, plainly a misnomer, as the rock therewith was black as night.

"I feel as far away from you when you are silent, David," whispered Hela. "As though your body were here, but your spirit had gone to some far place, outside of Sanctuary."

"I was thinking, I guess, of the past when,—according to the old books—our forefathers fought with colored demons, in some vast cavern remote and unconnected with Sanctuary! Legend, of course, but thought of it stirs me vaguely. I cannot imagine a people fighting, killing. . . ."

They were interrupted. A disembodied voice was speaking, with all reverence. . . .

"David Hadup! David Hadup!"

The voice came out of the Communication Booth they were passing.

David excused himself, stepped into it, said, "I am here. Who wants me?"

"This is Ledlong, in charge of workers in the Southern Facing. David Hadup. Something fearful is happening here."

"Well, well, what is it?"

"Beyond the facing, on the other side of it, as it were, sounds—sounds exactly like those we make as we work! As though other people, of a kind perhaps we know nothing of, were in there, working toward us."

Nonsense! How could there be another side to a facing? And how could there possibly be any people save Sanctuarians? Tame me in, Ledlong. Silence your workers, so I may hear."

Instantly it came, the sound of many strong implements at work, muted, as though they were separated from him by

one of Sanctuary's own corridor walls.

"Your men are silent, idle, Ledsong!" asked David, his voice trembling a little.

"By the ashes of your fathers, sir, I swear it!"

WHEN David came out of the Communication Booth to rejoin Hela, his face was so white that her eyes went big with a strange terror.

"I must go to the South Facing, instantly!"

"Tell me David, what has happened? Someone has fallen? The shoes have failed?"

"No, no, it's nothing I can explain, because there is no explanation possible—yet. I'll come back as soon as I find out. . . ."

"I'm going with you!"

"No, please! It may be no place for a woman. . . ."

"Any place you go, David, is a place for me! Try and stop me!"

He tried, of course, as man has tried to hold back his women since time began—and he failed, as man always has.

CHAPTER VIII

DAVID HASLUP, with Hela clinging to his belt, took the fastest-traffic Escalas into the south.

These, used by officials of the highest rank, and by overseers who must travel from place to place at the highest speed, were only used by the rulers in time of great need. David had used them less than half a dozen times in the four years since the death of his father.

There was an excellent reason for this: startled the Sanctuarians who had only seen the Chief Elder use the fast Escalas when there was an emergency. So now, as he sped along with Hela, his people stared at him, and with the camaraderie of equality, shouted to ask him what was wrong at the South Facing. He had no time to reply to them. They should have known, he thought, that if he wished them to know what was happening, he would have made a proclamation. However, he also knew that they'd all have the details by the time he reached the South Facing anyway. Grapevine telegraph, the oldsters had called it, with their strange penchant for meaningless

expressions, and it worked almost as fast as regular communications. Yes, Sanctuary would know the details as soon as he knew them. He could have gone back to his Meditation Room and seen it all through his Visualizer, but he preferred to see it at first hand.

Dizzy heights were put behind the two as they fled, along the circular Escalas designed for the swiftest possible descent into the warmer depths of the current Floor. There were times when they looked down into breath-taking depths, into stairwells where no one lived because the heights and depths were appalling. There were times when David had the very human desire to cling to Hela for support, as she was unashamedly clinging to him. But he reached the Floor, finally, rather glad that there had been no reason to test the efficiency of his shoes—and the small, hat-like oval on his head which would have kept him upright had he fallen.

The southbound Escala, running at Floor Level, was none too smooth, for the Floor was constantly being worked, repaired, smoothed—against Sanctuary's future generations' need of room in which to expand—and the two had a rough ride to the South Facing. Here the lights were plentiful, but eerie, because seen against veritable forests of rough columns that still were empty of elevators, still had not been polished, where houses were as rough as they had come from the hands of the workers.

"It's exciting," said Hela. "It's the most fun I've ever had, this traveling so fast, with the wind in my face!"

David seemingly did not hear her.

"David," she said, tugging at his sleeve. "I'm talking to you! I said it was fun. You didn't answer me!"

"Maybe I can't see any fun in it," he said, "when I can't help thinking of the possibilities. I can't feel any too safe, having you along, if, as Ledsong thinks, and I'm beginning to think myself, there actually are people beyond that facing. What kind of people are they? They can't be like us, for it's axiomatic that we are the crest of the human race. They can't, possibly, be superior to us. And if they are vastly inferior to us, they may envy us, and. . . ."

He broke off there, without mentioning the possibility of great trouble. Such trouble would be man-business, of course.

The old books spoke of women in battles with men, but there again they obviously were in error. Women were not made equal to struggle calling for the full strength of men.

"What was the word our fathers used for it, David?"

"For what?" David Hestup asked grumpily.

"Trouble, manual trouble, between peoples!"

"The word, my darling, was war; but like so many of the old words, it didn't mean anything, unless. . ."

Again he broke short off. Hela was not to be gainsaid, however. She'd read entirely too much concern in the face of her beloved.

"You're bothered about it, all right, David," she said. "I wouldn't be, if I were you. Maybe we need some sort of action, some kind of strife other than the necessity of constantly increasing Sanctuary's boundaries. . . . David, I've just thought of something!"

"WELL, let's have it. Most women never have an idea in the world, but when you get ideas they must mean something."

"It's this, David. Time after time, in enlarging Sanctuary, our workers have broken into great open spaces, left by burning mountains long ago. Big caverns. Those caverns have saved us a vast amount of work, requiring only to be incorporated in Sanctuary bodily, and made livable. . . ."

It was Hela's turn to hesitate, as though she were marshaling her thoughts.

"It strikes me that if there are people beyond the Facing, whose origin goes back beyond ours, or even is contemporaneous with ours, they, during an equal number of generations, must have had a kind of Sanctuary of their own. Not, of course, that it could possibly compare with ours, nor that its people could possibly be as progressive; but only that it must have been fecund, and therefore have had need to expand. In other words, might it not be possible that by excavating a bit further, breaking into the 'Sanctuary' of the people beyond the Facing, we might acquire a cavern so large that, for generations, we would not need to work so hard?"

David gasped. The idea, simple as it

sounded when Hela put it into words, had not occurred to him. Then the obvious corollary occurred at the same time to his logical mind.

"It's a grand idea, darling, but there's one catch to it that maybe hasn't occurred to you. . . ."

"Yes it has, dearest. Those people will feel the same way about our Sanctuary, and wish to possess it!"

"You've thought of this, and still made your suggestion?"

"Of course! There would be a struggle, naturally. Maybe even a manual one, in which people will be injured. But that anybody could possibly prevail against the might of Sanctuarians is inconceivable. We could possess any inhabited cavern with ease."

"And if our unknown, mysterious ones beyond the Facing have the same feeling about us? You see, my dear, this it has been that has been troubling me!"

The area of tradesmen, or commerce—always a beehive-like portion of Sanctuary—had been left behind. Its noisy cove, its blaring auction-speakers, its blatant signs over doors of the traders, usually irritated David. He never visited it if he could help, commanding tradesmen into his presence when he had need of anything, and he never examined it in his Vandalier unless a riot call went out. The lowest grade of Sanctuarians engaged in trade—younger sons of younger sons of the Elders, who had no authority in Sanctuary; and their mates. David could stop the turning of every wheel, the raucous bleating of every voice, at any moment he desired. But since trade kept most of Sanctuary occupied it did no real harm, except to the nerves.

And the tradesmen had paid him certain compliments that he could not forget. They used paper and metal money bearing his bust-picture, which amused him. That it might, with as much accuracy, have been the likeness of the first David Hestup in no way detracted from the reverent thought which had inspired the likeness. In case of war, these tradesmen. . . .

But he drove thoughts of them from his mind. He and Hela had reached the South Facing, which happened, at this point, to be one of those awesomely deep-high, vertical traverses that would one

day carry fast-traffic Escalas from the heights to the depths and return, and therefore, in its present state, gave him—and the workers—unobstructed view of the entire Facing.

The facing ran east and west, the old words for directions being retained. And now, to the north of it, the streets and corridors were packed with dirty-faced, sweaty Sanctuarians, with awe and terror in their faces. Their leaders, each with his own century of men—one hundred workers—stood between their men and the facing, as though already prepared to lead them into battle against supernatural forces, as they were accustomed to leading them to battle against the ageless borders of Sanctuary. All men stood—with not a servile one among them, however—as David and his prospective mate appeared.

David noted, with some surprise, that all the other Elders had likewise been sent for, and that all of them were here ahead of him. This was serious. Those Elders themselves must have sent for him, or instructed Ledlong to do it. The situation was already beyond them, though only the weird sounds came through the Facing.

THE Elders, of course, were the eldest sons, in direct line of descent from the First Fifty said to have led The Entry—that mystical wording by which the old books referred to the partition of Sanctuarians from the gods, or from the yellow devils of mythical "outside." It was difficult to know just what was meant.

Towering Jan Schmidt, for instance, in charge of all the implements by which Sanctuarians won against the ageless rocks. He was here, in the forefront, grim of visage—of an older generation than David, a contemporary of David's father, who wouldn't pass on his place until he died.

David privately doubted if old Jan Schmidt would ever die. The husky, hearty, prolific Schmidts only counted eight generations, even now, against eleven for David Haslup. Sanctuary was filled with Schmidts, not all of whom had been too considerate of the marital rights, down the years, of their fellow countrymen. But they were mighty men, who gave allegiance to no family save that of the Haslups.

"Well, Jan, what do you make of it?" said David, after listening to the unmistakable drilling sounds from what seemed to be deep in the Facing.

"I think little of it," said Jan Schmidt. "I take what I hear and have been told, on faith! If there are others, they will appear in their own time. What do the old books say, or would you know?"

David understood, and was amused by the obvious disapproval in Jan Schmidt's voice. The old boy didn't approve of him and his high-and-mighty, new-fangled ideas, and didn't care if David knew it—though he'd have crushed anybody, between his huge palms, who dared to question his loyalty to the Haslups, or even dared to disapprove of them as he did!

"If those sounds are made by people approximately like us, Jan," said David, "we shall have to revise a good many of our ideas about our own pasts, won't we? About whence we came, for instance? About the possibility. . . ."

"I never question the old books, David," said Jan heavily, keeping his protruding, smoldering eyes fixed on the Facing. "My faith is of the sort that you could do with nicely. I do not quibble with the writings of the gods. . . ."

"Gods nothing! Our own forefathers wrote those books!"

"Without outside inspiration, David? Nonsense! How could they imagine things they had never seen? They *would* have been guided by . . . guided by. . . ."

"Astral entities, Jan?"

David, in reality, cared little what Jan thought, nor was he particularly interested in the conversation—as like a hundred others he had had with Jan as one copy of a book was like another copy—and only used this method of passing time until they should all know what was coming to them through the Facing.

It was obvious, after a careful survey of the Facing, and a checking of the sounds at various places, that the breakthrough would take place almost in the geographical center of the Facing, and fully five hundred feet above Sanctuary floor. It would happen any minute now.

Uola remained close to David, her slim, delightful body touching his. Contact with her almost made him forget the possible danger that threatened. His face flushed, his heart hammered,

and he did not look at her lest the others notice, and carry gossip.

"They're coming through, David," said Jan quietly.

A tremendous, shocking, numbing roar swallowed Jan's words. It was a sound like nothing ever heard in Sanctuary—which had never known "dynamite" as anything save a meaningless word.

A SOLID block of granite fell out of the Facing, opening a hole fully fifty feet square. Jan Schmidt had shouted a warning, so that the block fell into Sanctuary without harming anyone—and Sanctuary, to the terror of the workers, seemed to shake and tremble throughout. A powdery dust, for several moments, obscured the vision of them all.

"Ashes of our fathers!" ejaculated Jan Schmidt, which proved how deeply he was moved, how harshly flung out of his phlegm the old man was, that he mouthed an oath for the first time since David could remember.

Men stood now in the opening where the vast block of granite had been. Men like Sanctuarians, save for marked, grotesque differences in dress. Their general size was about the same. Their faces were the same color. They carried implements in their hands, however, like none that Sanctuarians had ever seen.

White, startled faces were peering down at the silent horde of Sanctuarians, in full view in the light of their great, portable suns.

"Gordamighty!" said one of the men up there. David did not understand the word at all. Then, the same man said: "Stop pushing, do you think I want to go head-first. . . ."

Those behind, up there, were pushing against those before—and the words of the speaker were interrupted when he toppled out of the great opening, and, screaming, somersaulted down to break his body on the great block of granite that had fallen.

The man's words had told David much. His fall had told him more.

The language of the mysterious new ones was akin to that of Sanctuarians. The speakers were inferior to Sanctuarians—also that man would have come drifting down slowly, easily, to land without the slightest hurt to his body.

David called out: "Who is your

leader? Let us see him. I want to ask him what this is all about."

A new face pushed into the opening. It was a grim, cold, determined face. It looked down, the eyes taking in everything within the area of light. Then the voice said:

"Provide us with means of getting down to you, instantly!"

The voice angered David. "May I ask why you see fit to issue commands, as though you were superior to the Chief Elder of Sanctuary?"

"Yes, you may ask. It is my intention to come down to you, reasonably and alone, if possible, but with men at my back if necessary, and take possession of the area occupied by you, in the name of the High Command of Absaroka! You will prepare instantly to accede to Absarokan authority!"

David looked about at the faces of his people. That of Jan Schmidt was purple with wrath. Fury masked the faces of all he could see. The faces of the Elders might have been one face—and that face one filled with righteous anger. A strange, incomprehensible joy burst in the heart of David Haslop, who lifted his eyes to give quiet answer to the heady-eyed spokesman of the strangers.

"Come down yourself," he said, "and you'd better bring everybody with you that you've got! You'll need every man, and plenty you probably haven't got, to take rule over Sanctuary!"

IX

AS nearly as David could tell, the face of the Absarokan commander did not change in the least.

His eyes merely played over the Sanctuarians speculatively, as though he were numbering them. Then, in a low voice, using words David could not understand, he spoke to those about him.

David frowned as someone tendered a small cylinder to the commander. It looked black and harmless at the distance. The Sanctuarians watched, breathlessly, and with something of fear—which David could feel, as though it were something tangible—passing through the ranks of those close enough to see.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," he

snapped at his people, for them to pass on to those beyond reach of his voice. "For what harm can they do us, since there is no way for them to get down to our level without smashing themselves on the rocks!"

"The cylinder, David," said Jan Schmidt, "has a familiar look somehow, as though it were something I had dreamed seeing, or had read about in the old books. . . ."

"You and your dreams and your books, Jan!" ejaculated David. "Dreams mean nothing, and much of the matter in the old books means less. What can they possibly do to us at such a great distance!"

"I do not know, but I should move our people behind the great columns, if I were in authority."

"And let these . . . these . . . crawling things out of the rocks think we fear them, Jan! That would be the height of folly, the very worst psychology. . . ."

"Psychology may be a word leading to death, David," said Jan. "Do you tell our people to move back, else I shall assume authority to do so."

"Go ahead, Jan, if you think they will obey you in my presence. Perhaps, in view of possible danger from these crawlers on two legs, it would be well for us to have a test of authority right now."

"I do not question your authority, David. Pretend that old Jan said nothing, but if your father were alive. . . ."

"He isn't!" said David shortly.

The leader of the Absorokans held the cylinder in his right hand for a moment or two. He spoke again to David and his people.

"We give you one more chance to capitulate," he said. "Then we take action."

"And what form will that action take, since you have no means by which to reach us—and would find yourselves in deep trouble if you could?"

"This!" said the Absorokan calmly, tossing the cylinder from his hand. A spattering of sparks came from the cylinder. It somersaulted over and over as had the oddly dressed man who had tumbled from the great hole. David laughed.

"Even their implements fall without power," he said definitely.

But a vague doubt filled him as the thing fell, for he saw the Absorokans step back out of sight before the cylinder had

a chance to strike. It would strike, he saw, close to the group opposite David himself, on the other side of the great granite block.

"Hold your ground," he shouted at his people. "Show no fear of their puny demonstrations."

The thing did not strike. Something happened to it before it could. David thought a Sanctuarian put out his hand, contemptuously, to grab the cylinder, but wasn't sure. The workers often, to amuse themselves, pitched and caught bits of rocks, implements and the like, while they worked. The Sanctuarian did the natural thing.

But then . . . chaos. The man who grabbed the cylinder, well, an awesome thing happened to him. He went to pieces as a roar greater even than that which had heralded the falling forth of the great block, caused Sanctuary to rock and tremble again. David saw the man's head jump straight up from his shoulders to a height of twenty feet and there, by some queer necromancy, break apart as though some invisible something inside it had burst it asunder.

Then he noticed other things while the shock of the percussion held his eyes open beyond his power to close them. Twenty Sanctuarians had vanished utterly, and where they had stood the rocks, the Facing, the granite block, were smeared with blood, with flesh, and with brains. Twenty of his people!

DAZEEDLY he lifted his eyes to the great gap. It still was empty. Puffs of dust eddied up the Facing, as though to mark further activity of the Absorokans. Great cries of terror were now echoing horribly through Sanctuary. Sanctuarians were racing deeper into their home at top speed. They forgot even their portable sons in their haste to escape the horror from the opening.

Hela was plucking at the arm of David. Her cheeks were wet with tears, her eyes big with terror.

"Come away, David. They have something that drops at a distance!"

Against his will, and more for her sake than his own—as he told himself—David allowed Hela to lead him to safety beyond the first of the great, rough-hewn pillars. But before he passed out of sight around the first one, he paused to look back.

The Absorakans had returned, oblivious of any danger that might possibly be awaiting them, and their leader was looking down, studying the surface of the Facing. His men were packed around him, but what they said he could not hear.

That, however, no more cylinders were to be hurled, he realized. He would watch them, see what they did.

"Come, David," begged Hela, "if they do to you as they did to those others, I shall die! Poor Jan Schmidt! Now his boastful son will take his place. He warned us, but he did not try to save himself; and he knew, David, he knew!"

Stunned by the catastrophe, his imagination working overtime as he foresaw that they had but been given a foretaste of what was to come, David allowed himself to be led away from the Facing. But when he had retreated for perhaps a mile, he began to encounter Sanctuarians who had slowed in their retreat at commands of the Elders. The latter, their faces white, stared at the face of David Hasbup.

George Blake said: "This is a grievous thing you have allowed to happen to us, David! If something isn't done, at once, to outweigh the result of it, the authority of the house of Hasbup will vanish into nothing."

"And what authority will take its place?" said David, shocked into the realization that he had made a mistake, before the eyes of thousands of Sanctuarians, which was bound to affect their belief in his infallibility.

"No authority at all, David," said Blake. "And where there is no authority . . ."

Blake broke off. All eyes were turned now toward the Facing, as from that direction came sharp commands, the sounds of rocks rolling under many feet.

"They've got down, somehow, David," said Blake. "What do we do now?"

David hesitated, and as he did so some of his self-confidence returned. These newcomers were not adepts in the negotiating of heights and depths, regardless of their ability to destroy from a distance. What weapons could he use against them? Sanctuary, never having had any need for weapons, was possessed of none.

"Wait," he said, "until we see what they intend doing."

"We have already waited too long! We should have done something to them the instant they broke through. More than that, we should never have allowed them to break through."

David was not listening to George Blake, for now his naturally swift, keen mind was working overtime, and his eyes were turned toward the Facing. From among their portable suns, as he watched, came the front rank of the Absorakans. They carried strange implements in their hands. Long slender cylinders, with gleaming metal points that looked sharper than some of the implements with which Sanctuarians worked and polished the rocks. David held his ground, speaking only to snap a command at Hela Dorn.

"Return to your mother at once, and stay there until you hear from me!"

THIS time Hela did not protest. She opened her mouth to do so, when David, knowing without even looking at her, snapped again.

"It is a command!"

David watched the advancing men curiously for a moment. He expected other things to be flung from their hands, things that would destroy Sanctuarians when they struck. But nothing of the sort came. The Absorakans seemed to be depending on the long, sharpened cylinders they carried in their hands. They advanced swiftly, running. That seemed to indicate that they must come to close quarters to win their objective, whatever it was. There were so many of them that David knew that the great opening in the Facing was pouring men into Sanctuary as water poured from some of Sanctuary's wells and springs.

"Pass the word along for our people to pick up rocks they can handle, and tools with which to fight, and take to the Escalas, going no higher, however, than the next level above this. They must make use of all possible cover, guarding their bodies from hurt by thrown things."

Sanctuarians did not understand—except to obey. Rocks were grasped in hands that for ages had been accustomed to their handling. Picks, mattocks, iron bars, were grasped as weapons. Sanctuarians moved to their Escalas, rising swiftly to the second level. David led the

way, looking back over his shoulder at the faces of the Absarokans, who were so plainly surprised at the swift retreat—the effortless retreat—of the Sanctuarians. That they couldn't see how it was managed without the feet moving, one ahead of the other, was obvious.

But the Absarokans came on. They seemed to be as many as the rocks at the base of the South Facing. They poured into the lower level, scattered out—and seemed to be coming without end, as they were fed by fresh contingents from the gap. The Absarokan leader shouted to them, just once:

"Surrender, you fools! You have no chance of survival against us."

No Sanctuarian dignified to answer. David looked about him, making sure that the second level was packed with his own men. Then he stared down at the Absarokans who were massing below. There were too many to miss.

"Let them have it!" snapped David.

Down from the heights, hurled by the power of thousands of arms accustomed to the heaviest work man had ever done, sped the weapons Sanctuarians had taken with them to the heights. Cries of pain came up as the rocks struck with shattering, booming sounds. Hundreds of the enemy were down. Some stayed down, their skulls bashed in, blood spouting. The Absarokan commander cried out:

"Up those ramps after them!"

David had expected this, and was ready for it. He watched Absarokans pile thickly on the Escalas, clinging to one another as they rode up the inclines toward the first level. When the first of them were almost to the second level, David shouted again, knowing that his command would be passed on.

"Reverse the Escalas! Follow the enemy back down, using your mining tools!"

Instantly, throughout the area, the Escalas were reversed, and the enemy, startled, started to run—not down the Escalas, but up, dismayed because, as the reverse speed of the Escalas increased, they ran without advancing. Sanctuarians, with a great shout, a wordless shout of triumph—which David could only ascribe to some racial memory, since he had never heard its like—flung themselves onto the descending Escalas, brandishing picks, mattocks, steel bars. They reached

the Absarokans, smashed into them.

Screaming men plunged two hundred feet to death on the rock floor. Some fought, but they were not at home on these hideous contraptions. They hadn't a chance. They fought as best they could, but they lost. George Blake's middle son grabbed one of those sharpened poles from the hand of a man who tried to push it sharply into his stomach, drove the man over the side with a push of his right hand, reversed the unfamiliar weapon, and pushed it into the body of the next man beyond.

DAVID'S eyes widened as he saw the thing go clear through the Absarokan. The latter went backward. George Blake's middle son, Barte, clung to the weapon a moment too long and was pulled over the edge with it. Realizing in time, he released his grip. The Absarokan fell like a stone. But Barte Blake, standing upright, floated easily and gently down. David groaned, foreseeing what the Absarokans would do to young Blake when he landed among them.

He was totally unprepared for what actually did happen.

An Absarokan pointed at the slowly descending body of Blake.

"Look, General Selig! He doesn't fall as we do! He comes down easily. He is not like us. He is bewitched! They will kill us all. Flee! Flee for our lives!"

General Selig—which David supposed to be the Absarokan commander—calmly thrust the screaming man through. But his words had done their damage, and David was quick to grasp the Sanctuary advantage.

"Down, Sanctuarians!" he shouted. "Hand to hand, immediately! Not by the Escalas, but out and over and down!"

There were gasps of consternation, because so few, comparatively, of the Sanctuarians had ever had recourse to their anti-gravitational shoes; but no one hesitated to obey the command of David Haslup.

So, down from that first level, as one man, floated hundreds upon hundreds of the Sanctuarians. The Absarokans gazed upward in terror. Their mouths were open. Their eyes were wide, protruding. David laughed in high glee, cried out.

"If they do not flee in terror, return to this level in the same manner you are

now going down!"

It was a good jest, which all Sancturians would appreciate, for David knew, and they knew, that the Sancturians could no more rise into the air than the Ahsarokans could. He was sure, however, that the Ahsarokans did not know this—and would act accordingly.

They did. With screams of terror—man's innate terror of the unknown—they fled toward the South Facing. David, exalted, cried out again:

"Seize all of them! Slay only a few to frighten the others! We need them all to do our roughest work! Prevent their escape into their own shade!"

Privately, as the Sancturians descended slowly, and the Ahsarokans fled, flinging their weapons aside as useless impediments, David wondered just what would happen if the Ahsarokans regained their courage at just the wrong time, and returned to the attack. But from the scrambling sounds, the cries of terror at the Facing, he knew that — this time at least—he would have no such problem.

Nor did he have. Many were taken. Their leader was brought to stand before David Haslop. General Selig and Haslop stared into each other's eyes. Each knew — and his eyes spoke his knowledge—that he looked into the eyes of a strong man.

"Well?" said Selig.

"Lead the way into your shade, for a selected group of my people," said David shortly. "You will be surrounded by us. If danger threatens, you will be destroyed."

Selig shrugged, said softly: "I have no choice, sir. It seems that now, after years of faithful service to Ahsaroka, I must betray my own kind."

David digested the man's words carefully, knowing very well, after a look into his eyes, that General Selig was not the kind of man to turn traitor to his own. Whoever believed it, even for an instant, must be considered a fool. David Haslop—he hoped—was no fool.

"What is the number of Ahsarokans?" said David.

Selig told him. David's head spun as he heard the information. If Selig spoke the truth, there were more Ahsarokans beyond the facing than there were Sancturians on this side of it.

A clash involving them all would be too ghastly to contemplate.

X

IT came to David Haslop that the commonsense course was, if at all possible, to avoid any clash that could only result in chaos for all concerned, and inestimable bloodshed. There must be a way to do this, he felt sure.

Obviously, the Ahsarokans had been amazed at something which, for generations, had been a commonplace to the Sancturians — the antigravitational shoes. Maybe if this one thing were a marvel to these others even more marvelous might be found in the heart of Sanctuary.

So David, looking into Selig's eyes, said: "I am going to ask you to place a guard of your own men at the gap in the Facing. Then I wish you to select a score of men from among your group now inside our borders, and go with me on an inspection of Sanctuary. It will take an hour or so, perhaps more."

Selig hesitated, then nodded. "After all," he said, unsmiling, "my superiors will wish to know everything possible about Sanctuary, and how it will fit into our future plans . . ."

"Of conquest?" said David pointedly.

Selig shrugged. "I don't know. I do as I am told. I initiate nothing. It is possible that my superiors will execute me for having any traffic with you at all. You realize, of course, that word has already gone back from the point of breakthrough, to my people, and that plans are going forward there even now, regarding this new land. And may I remind you, sir, that I do not know your cognomen?"

"My name is David Haslop, eleventh of my line in direct descent," said David, trying to keep a touch of pride, a hint of arrogance, out of his voice.

"My name you already know," said Selig. But there was a frown on his brow, and his eyes probed those of David as though they had been invisible surgical instruments. The frown did not leave as the selected party, composed of officials under Selig, began the march into the heart of Sanctuary.

"David Haslop," mused Selig. "David Haslop. The name has a sound of familiarity about it."

David stopped, gasping for breath. The implications in Selig's musing filled

him with amazed confusion. It was all of a minute before he could find his voice.

"Are you trying to tell me, sir, that there are Haslups in Absaroka?"

"No. No, I am not trying to tell you that, but only that the name sounds familiar. It goes a long way back—back, I think, to records preserved from generations ago, when the first gods gave birth to our forefathers—gods from somewhere 'outside' . . ."

"Outside!" gasped David. "Do your people also have legends of somewhere outside? It is the same with us! And this Haslup you mention!"

"It begins to come back to me slowly. I have not read the old books since my riled, rather radical youth, when I advocated a return to the early simplicities. But I remember a little, and it strikes me that the name I recall had to do with one of the outside gods . . ."

There was a sudden, awed murmuring among the Sanctuarists who composed the stiff guard about the Absarokans. People stared in amazement at David as they heard these words which seemed to be collateral evidence of his divine descent. David would not have been human if he had not instantly realized all the ramifications of Selig's stumbling words. David was of divine origin! His people heard it. Even now the word was going outward from their lips, would be all through Sanctuary before the visiting party started into Absaroka. Even his mistake which had cost the lives of scores of his people would be forgiven in the light of what Selig had indicated.

It occurred to David to probe further.

"And Blakes? Are there Blakes among you, or legends about the name?"

"Not that I recall."

"And Schmidts, what of them?"

BEFORE he answered, Selig came the nearest to grinning any Absarokan had come since the confluence of the two peoples.

"Schmidt, David Haslup? You don't, by any chance, mean Smiths, do you? For if you do, well, there are thousands of them in Absaroka. Sturdy people, all, with their fingers in every activity, their marital proclivities the despair of every Absarokan household. They would have been killed long ago by their fellows, but for a decree of my superiors. It appears that my superiors regard their offspring

as ideal for our purposes. The Smiths never produce weaklings, so my superiors choose to ignore the purely technical details of their individual procreations! They do, however, let off easily, outraged husbands who protest against family violation with bayonets."

"Bayonets?"

"Yes. Those long cylinders which proved so useless against your fighters. They are evolved from the very first weapons that came into Absaroka."

David perceived—and thought a great deal about it as he conducted the visiting party courteously through Sanctuary—that the two peoples had had a parallel origin and development.

"I do not understand your need of weapons, however," said David. "Has there been internal strife among you? Has your high command no authority to prevent dissension? Or do you have legends of other people who, as you have just done, may break in on you?"

"We have twice been broken in on. Once from the south, once from the west . . ."

"The old words again!" ejaculated David. "North, south, east, west."

"Yes, except that we do no work toward the east. Some taboo or other which we rigidly observe. Something having to do with a possibly catastrophic breakthrough."

"We have the same legend, Selig! We have, indeed, so many things in common, that they bear looking into carefully. For instance, you and I have no difficulty in understanding each other, though our people have been unknown to one another for generations. It strikes me, general . . . by the way, that is a common title, or name. We find it in our old books, though we never use it."

"It is a title of military high command, its origin going back to whatever the First Cause may have been. It means that I, under the general ruling committee, am master of workmen, soldiers and the like—though, unfortunately, I do not have the power of life and death."

"One thing more. The cylinder you dropped among us, slaying twenty of our people . . ."

Selig's face darkened. "That should not be held against me, in any negotiations that take place, since your people destroyed five times as many of my men."

"Perhaps," said David, "a hundred and twenty men are not too much to pay for future, profitable negotiations. By the Ashes, that gives me an idea! Suppose, instead of fighting, we reach an agreement, throw Absaroka and Sanctuary, and their people, together—the whole to be known as Sanctuary, of course!—and trade, intermarry, forming a friendly union instead of an inimical one. It would more than double our strength and our happiness, after the two peoples have amalgamated. Power, of course, would reside in Sanctuary!"

"That is not for me to decide, Heshup. My superiors are stubborn, headstrong, arrogant — descendants of officers who were, in their own minds, never wrong, always victorious . . ."

Even as Selig spoke his eyes were bulging as he stared at the wonders of Sanctuary to him. David had only to watch his face to know something of the difference between Sanctuary and Absaroka. Most of the implements and the activities of Sanctuary were marvelous to all the Absarokans, and they exclaimed with awe freely, not realizing how much, in so doing, they were giving themselves away to David Heshup.

To them the suns were miracles. The Escalas were marvels. The anti-gravitational shoes—about which David was careful to furnish no explanation, but whose secret he hinted would be given to Absarokans, for a consideration, when he was satisfied that amicable amalgamation could be effected—were inventions of the gods. The cars along the streets did not evoke much comment, though they did cause slight frowns of puzzlement which led David to believe that Absaroka also had cars, but cars inferior to, or different from, those of Sanctuary. The elevators too, came in for careful examination.

SANCTUARY money caused their faces to light up, but money, as money was obviously not new to them—but only the shape and form and value of it.

"You spoke of previous break-throughs, Selig," said David who, while the Absarokans studied Sanctuary, studied the Absarokans, especially Selig. "Tell me, were the people of the successive break-throughs absorbed into Absaroka, or Absaroka into them?"

Selig's brows lifted. The question

seemed to amaze him.

"Why, they were brought instantly under Absarokan influence, of course! What other result could there possibly have been?"

"Naturally I do not know. How far back in time was the most recent break-through?"

"Seventy years."

David grinned inwardly, with satisfaction. Seventy years, he judged, were long enough for the addition to Absaroka to have become one people. This might make them more difficult to manage, diplomatically, or less so. It might be easier to treat with a people solidly behind their rulers, than with people whose elements were in general discord.

David decided that, on the whole, the triple-amalgamation was better for him and his.

"The experiences of your people, Selig," said David, "and our experiences with you, just now, seem to indicate that there are many other caverns than ours. In ten generations of encountering vast black caverns, however, this is the first time we have found humanity in any one of them. We've found human fossils, of course, but nothing else—or maybe they were fossils of extra-human beings. However, your break-through today seems to prove something that I have always thought not only possible but probable . . ."

"And that, Heshup?"

"That it is really silly for a people living in one comparatively small area—the rocks—which obviously stretch out on forever and forever, to limitless distances in every direction — to feel that their small group is the chosen of the Great Being to occupy the limitless immensity in which the Great Being, unseen, dwells. Your presence, and ours, prove that as the rocks are limitless in time and space, and the caverns beyond counting, yet others, from time to time, must be found in which people have dwelt since The Entry. We will encounter them as we widen our boundaries, push our horizons deeper in every direction—save upward and eastward, beyond certain limits of which men are divinely forbidden to go. It is even possible, though highly improbable, that races superior to our own may be found. Why not? As we have proved ourselves superior to you . . ."

"Have a care, Heshup!" interrupted

Selig, his hand falling to his belt where a sharpened instrument reposed in an oblong sheath. "One can stand for just so much personal insult, and for none at all to his race! Countless lives have been lost for less!"

"However, why cannot sensible men face facts?"

"It depends, sir, on who interprets the facts, and how, and to whose disadvantage! Your race may be superior to mine in some respects. That we shall prove ourselves superior to you in others I am quite sure—and I have the advantage of you in having seen much of your country, while you have seen none of mine!"

"Except its people," said David quietly, which statement he allowed Selig to interpret as he might.

The tour of Sanctuary took much longer than David had expected, for the Ahsarekians asked many questions, when they realized that, at least, the Sanctuariums were not identical, which had to be answered. And David was glad of the curiosity of his own people, for they made an end of trade, of struggle and endeavor, to line the corridors, the lobbies, to pack the elevators — forming, ranks and ranks, everywhere, along all routes, to stare at these visitors from another place. They baffled all estimates, David thought, gave the Ahsarekians general the impression that Sanctuary was far more thickly inhabited than was the actual case. He could see that Selig was impressed.

When the tour was finished, even to a brief examination of the Columbarium — into which only Hushup and Selig went, and where the latter explained some of the burial customs of his own people, whose carcases, he said, we used to enrich certain, to David, incomprehensible "gardens"—David proposed a return visit to Ahsaroka. Selig was eager.

"It is only fitting," he said, "that you go in person to offer the allegiance of your people to my superiors."

DAVID laughed, rather glumly. "I would command your superiors to visit me first, Selig," he said, "were it not for my curiosity to see your land of Ahsaroka. Let us discuss that no further. It is, apparently, a matter between your superiors and myself."

At this juncture, by one of those "accidents" which the female of the species

finds so convenient, David's sister, accompanied by Hela Dorn, met them on the Street of the Mourners. David, gasping, looked at the face of Bram Selig, saw it light up for the first time. A vague uneasy stirring went all through him—until he realized that the eyes of the visitor were fixed, not on Hela, but on David's sister, Doris.

David offered no explanation of the girls' presence, both to their chagrin and Selig's. But the incident gave him food for thought. Doris might be of use to him, when he looked over the situation in Ahsaroka, and met the superiors of Selig face to face.

They left the girls, confusion and blushes on their faces, behind them, went on, rejoicing the visiting party.

Then, recklessly taking with him a guard no larger than Selig's group, David said: "I am at your service, Selig, for the return to Ahsaroka."

"You're not afraid of betrayal? I could hold you for a hostage, you know."

"Perhaps your superiors will do that, whether you wish it or not!"

"That," said Selig ruefully, "is what I'm afraid of."

"Let them," said David. "If the attempt is made . . . well, you must realize that Sanctuary has secrets of its own which I would have been foolish to show you until we have, as two nations, a basis of understanding. So, let me say only this: if anything happens to me, within twenty hours no Ahsarekian will be left alive in your country!"

He hoped, naturally, that his bluff would not be called. He also wondered from what well of racial memory, he had found the ability to tell such falsehoods with such conviction.

"Maybe David Hushup the first," he told himself, "passed on characteristics to me I've never even suspected until now! It's an amazing experience, really—suggesting future highly profitable soul-probing—to discover these new things about myself."

Selig, when they reached the South Facing again, stared at it in amazement. The five hundred foot sheer cliff was no longer difficult to surmount. David had spoken words to Jan Schmidt's sorrowing—but secretly delighted—eldest son, and in place of the sheer wall there was now a new Escala as wide as the opening, and a bit more sharply inclined than most

Escalas in Sanctuary, up which the little combined force traveled without effort.

For the first time Selig was unsure of himself, having thus far plainly regarded his capture by Sanctuarians as a temporary fortune of war in which there could be just one result: victory for Absaroka.

"You are swift, Hasup," he said, "and efficient."

"It's nothing really, Selig," said David calmly, "nothing at all."

Sanctuary, through its brilliant young Chief Elder, was learning a new trade: diplomacy. It might develop into something extremely important. He must remember, on his return—which he never doubted for a moment—to select a committee of Second Sons to investigate all the ramifications of diplomacy which, up until now, had been merely one of those meaningless words in the old books.

David tried not to show his surprise when he stood in the great opening, and gazed for the first time into the vastness, the thickly populated, the grimly disciplined, unsmiling limits of Absaroka.

Selig and his men, after all, had given him but the barest hint of what to expect.

For the first half hour, as they proceeded, he fought against his growing doubt.

He saw before him, and as he advanced, all around him, a nation that, if it but knew it, could swallow Sanctuary as the lusty gods of old had swallowed the hideous, lewd and ribidinous gods of staff whose function, now, had been taken over by Sanctuary's Restoring Booths.

His face must give them no inkling of this terrifying fact. His guard, naturally, gave no inkling itself. It merely stared and held its breath.

XI

MORE and more, as they proceeded into Absaroka, obviously swinging far to the east to avoid the hot, watery, boiling sections known to the ancients as Yellowstone, it was borne home to David Hasup that his people and these had somehow, amazingly, a common origin.

Among the Sanctuarians there were blondes, brunets, redheads. The same

thing applied to the Absarokans. That both, in the beginning, had evolved from a wide mixture of other races he would have believed utterly—but for the fact that this would have been sacrilege of the highest order. Not even David Hasup dared enquire back beyond the records of the old books.

And there were other similarities. Cars, for example. Absarokans had them, too, but they seemed to be developed as hiding places—portable ones—rather than for rapid transit. They were familiar in outline, reminding him of the ancient etchings of the old books, and a word to use instead of cars. Tanks. Strange name, but there it was. These were not tanks, in the old sense of the word, but that they had developed from them was obvious.

Instead of wheels, they had endless conveyors, or moving Escalas, which traveled with them wherever they went. It was as though each individual had his own Escala, which flung itself out before him as he went, and automatically rolled itself up behind him, and was always a part of him. Except that the tanks were not beings, but things—cars, in effect. David asked Selig what they were called, and was confirmed in his belief.

"Tankers!" A combination, apparently, of tanks and cars. "They are used by the military in their travels among the workers, to see that the latter progress with their appointed tasks."

There were elevators, too, huge, ponderous affairs. Absaroka did not have the distant ceilings of Sanctuary, which puzzled David. Nor had Absarokans gone downward so far. They had, however, spread over a far vaster area. And their homes were as rough-hewn as the earliest one of Sanctuary architecture, being given to inhabitants almost as picks and mattocks carved them out of the rock. And the rock was different, more porous and pliable—and therefore requiring more columns to uphold the roof. Picks, shovels and mattocks were different in material, but similar in design to those of Sanctuary.

And the Absarokans, to David's disgust, had nothing even remotely resembling Sanctuary's Restoring Booths. Instead, people stuffed their mouths with bunks of material which, while it proved the ancient legends of Sanctuary, was nevertheless a disgusting bit of proof.

And to provide for this obscene stuffing, the Absarokans had what they called gardens, out of which grew strange forms of life—skin, if David remembered the palaver of his scientists, to that which, ages ago, had gone into the making of Sanctuary's coal. Absaroka had coal, too, but they had found just one combined use for it: heating and lighting.

The garden stuff gave David something to think about that staggered even his imagination. Absarokans produced the stuff—developed down the ages, according to Selig, from minute organisms brought into Absaroka during The Entry—and Sanctuary found it in the coal. That the current stuffs were skin to the some-old stuff made David wonder if even the peoples who ate, or otherwise used it, did not also date back far more vastly in time than eleven generations. Eleven generations, strangely enough, was as far back as the history of Absaroka went.

Who could be sure then that the origin of man didn't go back twenty generations, or a hundred, or a thousand? It made his brain whirl, just to think of it. That people would last for a thousand, even a million generations, he felt quite sure. Therefore why couldn't they already have lasted that long?

"If Jan Schmidt, the older one," thought David, "could read my mind, he would think me lost indeed! A thousand generations, forsooth! But I'd liefer believe our origin with the gods were more removed, somehow. There's more inspiration, more mental gymnastics, in it."

Absaroka had their own equivalent of Sanctuary's suns, areas of blinding light and heat which Selig had said was found necessary in the beginning, when the gods had given Absaroka both plants and fire, in order that the latter might nourish and bring to full fruition the former. It sounded complicated, but reasonable enough when you realized how bound up was the life of Sanctuary in the light of its many invented suns.

THERE seemed to be three classes of people. The workers, who labored in fields, gardens, pits of various kinds from which rocks of many shapes were taken, and whose lot was so hopeless that they did not even lift their eyes when Selig and his visitors passed them. There were the military, who kept the workers busy, and slew them out of hand if they

shirked. And there were the ones who did nothing whatever but live on the labors of the first, or rather the lowest class, and use the second class to see that the lowest one did its work.

The workers' lot irritated David, and he fully intended to make sure that it was bettered. He said as much to Selig, who stared at him in amazement.

"But they are conquered people, Haulup! Why should their lot be bettered? They work and feed us, better our living conditions, and we honor their women already above their deserts, by using them as vessels whereby to replenish our military ranks. They are not, of course, allowed to enter the houses of our ruling class, but await their pleasure in their own—where the ruling class makes visit them at regular intervals, established by Absarokan law, to begot soldiers. The men workers, of course, are their own children, begotten by their own men—and interim children, begotten during periods when the law feels that it is safe for the military, numerically, to remain static."

"What, if I may ask, governs this?"

Selig hesitated before answering. Then, to David's surprise, he leaned close and whispered.

"When they feel that we are becoming numerically strong enough to challenge their power, or are approaching that place."

It didn't sound so good. David thought, for continuous internal peace in Absaroka. Their rulers, he felt, were short-sighted, to put the matter tolerantly. That would have to be changed. He would free the workers, he decided, give them a chance. If, through their own lack of talents, they descended on their own to the status of workers, that was natural, and nothing could be done about it. But they would be freed, he'd see to that.

Later he smiled when, watching the laboring women closely, he saw them, even when their faces were the most hopeless, and their tasks the most onerous, steal sly glances at the visiting Sanctuarians. Women, it came to him, were all the same, no matter their station. They had to look at men, all men, and few of them could keep their thoughts out of their eyes. They, if not their men, would amalgamate easily!

One of Selig's men lifted some sort of

brass instrument to his lips, blew into it. A strange skirling, somehow spine-tingling sound, went keening through grim, forbidding Ahsaroka. The sound changed and varied, now high, now low, and David looked a question at Selig.

"We but send a signal of our arrival, Hushup," Selig explained.

"Don't they know?"

"Unofficially, yes. Officially, no."

David was on the point of telling him how this was done in Sanctuary, by vibro-communication, but thought better of it. It was just as well not to give away all his secrets at once. It was well enough for David to recognize the disadvantages of Ahsaroka, but scarcely policy to call Selig's attention to it.

A bit later David was ushered into what appeared to be the biggest black column he had seen so far. It was of obsidian, he thought, and monstrous. And obviously he was entering the headquarters of the ruler or rulers of Ahsaroka. There was much fuss and feathers. A scurrying to and fro of manials. More sounds on brass instruments. Loud voices, crisp with authority — plainly delegated, but none the less pompous and enjoyed by those who had it.

THEN, the main room, furnished . . . furnished . . . well, with a brightness and a garish variety that dimmed the glory of all of Sanctuary's combined suns. And there were a dozen or more men, all huge and bulbous, dressed in what looked like women's clothing, and with half-boots on their feet that still showed most of the bare skin, sitting on impressive looking niches in the wall of the main room.

There was silence, while the fat ones studied the newcomers. Most of the fat ones had thick, underslung lips, and some of them drooled.

Selig went forward humbly, bowing and scraping until David could have kicked him for his servility. David was left well behind so that he could not hear the words by which Selig explained the presence of men from Sanctuary.

But soon one of the bulbous men lifted his voice. It sounded squeaky, ridiculous, for David expected a voice that boomed and roared.

"Well, well, we command him to step forward and kneel before us with words of allegiance. We have need of more

workers, and wish to command him to bring them to us at once!"

David kept down his anger as best he could, showing the leader a smiling face.

"Why should I kneel to you, or even approach you?" he asked quietly. "Is it because you are so fat and nasty that you can't even move from your chair? Or are you afraid of comparisons when you stand close to me, where my men as well as yours can see which of us is the superior person?"

The big man's face went purple. He choked, gasped for breath.

David, without waiting for the explosion, snapped at Selig's guard about him.

"Go forward instantly, bow if you must, but begin telling that stuffed dross what you saw in Sanctuary! Go ahead. He won't be able to catch his breath to stop you until you're well under way, and then he'll be too interested to interrupt."

David held his breath for fear he would not be obeyed. But there was authority, and the calm assumption of obedience in his voice, and the Ahsarokan guard went forward to obey him.

"On second thought," snapped David, "you can talk better if you stand and face your elders, so that they can be sure to hear every word you have to say!"

Again they obeyed. One man, nervous, hysterical, almost shouted:

"Ah, Great Ones, there were mighty miracles in Sanctuary! Their women are lovelier than ours. Their men can rise into the emptiness, or descend through it, without the aid of anything save what they wear. They travel great distances without cars, swiftly, and without moving their feet. They can talk at immense distances and be heard, though they do not need to shout. They have great fires that are cold, but fill their land with light. And they have fires that heat intensely, yet give off no light . . ."

The spokesman had the attention of his masters, to the exclusion of David himself. The protruding eyes of the fat ones could not jerk themselves away from the words of their own soldiers—several of whom now interrupted one another, stumbling over one another in their manifest eagerness to relate the tale of marvels.

Selig looked on, amazed, unbelieving. David studied the man, then motioned

him to his side. Selig, looking sideways at his superiors, plainly afraid to depart without permission, was even more amazed when no superior objected, or even seemed to notice.

"You mentioned," said David quietly, "what seemed to me to be an ancient desire of the military to overthrow the power of the rulers. The means is here, at hand. Stand by me, with your men—if you are the highest ranker—and it shall be brought about, this minute. Of course pacific means will be tried first. I shall even the fat ones if I can. If I cannot, then may I depend upon you to stand by me—no matter what I say or do! With the understanding, of course, that in the new state composed of our two nations, you shall no longer be forced to abide by the laws of the fat ones, and will even have the satisfaction of watching them work off some of their fat!"

SELIG gasped. "How do I know that you can make good on any such impossible . . ."

"Look! Your own soldiers' tales have got their eyes popping out until you could thump them off with your fingers. When I follow that with what I have to say, they're sunk, if I can read character—which the Heslups have always been able to do. Then, if they're not quite sunk, I use their own cullen army against them. . . ."

"Does!" said Selig. "I've waited thirty years for this, and find it almost impossible to wait thirty seconds more!"

David blandly interrupted the Absaroka soldiers.

"Rulers of Absaroka, I invite you to visit Sanctuary as my guests, while your people and mine, in all walks of life, get together for mutually profitable trade. We have many things that will enrich you, which we will give to you for things you possess that will undoubtedly enrich us. Come to us and be our guests while all of us watch the peaceful mingling, without bloodshed, of two great races!"

"What," squeaked the spokesman, "can you bring to us that is better than what we have?"

"Restoration," said David calmly. "Do you never tire of the labor of lifting food and drink to your mouths? Do you never wish it were possible merely to sit and be fed, with no effort on your part?"

To his inner amusement, that almost erupted into shouts of laughter, the fat faces began to coo expressions of anticipatory delight.

"Come to us," said David, wasting no time, "and strong men will bear you to private and individual Restoring Booths, where you will have but to sit, and sleep if you like, while you are being replenished, without the need of lifting hands to mouth, opening mouth, chewing, swallowing or digesting . . ."

"But this is absurd!" was the squeaking answer. "It is impossible. What proof have we, save your word . . ."

Momentarily dismayed, David was at loss for an answer. But Selig spoke up quietly.

"I have seen, Great Ones. I have enjoyed. Every word is true."

David looked aside at the expressionless face of Selig, and realized that lying, like diplomacy, was probably a common characteristic of both races.

"Bring us these Restoring Booths," said the Great One, while his confreres licked their porcine lips.

"That is impossible. They are part of our walk and cannot be moved. There is but one way to reach them, by going to Sanctuary."

He whispered an aside to Selig.

"In ten days they'll be as slim as we are, though we won't tell them that. And each will spend plenty of time in his own Restoring Booth, each of which can be watched from outside by as many of your soldiers as you elect to use. By the end of that time . . . well, we shall see."

"Take us there!" squeaked the Great One.

"That, Selig," said David, grinning, "is a job for you. I wouldn't touch one of them, or ask my men to, with long-range stone hands! Not, you understand, that I don't think but that they'll be pretty decent fellows underneath all that fat, when we've worn them down, and indoctrinated them with the greatness of Sanctuary."

"We'll take them," said Selig grimly, "if we have to carry them in comfort on our backs—which, precisely, is what we'll have to do."

"It will, for them, be a triumphal entry into Sanctuary, and it will amuse all Sanctuarians! See to it."

"I hear and obey," said Selig quietly. "The Exodus begins at once. I hope the

trade will be brisk."

"You obey? Then let us experiment with something, as soon as your elders have gone down the ramp into Sanctuary. Will you?"

"I'll try anything suggested by the man who can twist the arrogant Great Ones about his fingers!"

"**G**OOD! Then remove military restraint from every last one of your laborers, men and women! Give them the freedom of both Absaroka and Sanctuary. It is my intention to give Sanctuarians, instantly, leave to roam at will—naturally observing property rights, which they would do anyhow—through Absaroka. After all, why should any of us work for a little while! Absaroka has gained the area of Sanctuary by bloodless conquest; Sanctuary has gained the limits of Absaroka by the same means. Let our people mingle."

"But to free the laborers, Haskup! They will go wild. They will destroy, loot, plunder, rape . . ."

"But they'll come first into Sanctuary, to see what has brought all this about. They'll mix with my people, and by the time they've exhausted all the wonders they'll forget age-long desires for vengeance and the possession of property!"

"Perhaps. Perhaps," said Selig, dubiously. "But it is a tremendous responsibility for me to take."

"I, David Haskup, Chief Elder of Sanctuary, soon to be Chief Elder of the two United States, take full responsibility for any possible catastrophe!"

XII

DAVID felt the thought wave of someone, knocking at the door of his mind, but he refused to answer. Sunk in reverie, he had no desire for converse with anyone. It could not, possibly, be important. There were never any emergencies in Sanctuary, and whoever knocked could wait. So, though his lips did not move, his brain said:

"Would you mind excusing me for now? I wish to be alone with myself."

And the invisible knocker went away, and David did not even bother to observe his face. It might have been anyone of Sanctuary's millions, though only the

elders ever bothered him. There now were twenty-five of them. In the beginning—whatever that had been—there had been fifty, but during the past thirty generations, half of their lines had come to an end. David sighed, wishing that, even in imagination, he could capture some of the robust hardships of the olden days. Things were too easy in Sanctuary. One never enjoyed close social contact, never had meetings face to face, because some ancestor had discovered that it was so much more efficient, so far less wearying, to meet people mentally. The Visi-tels had for generations been the medium of contact. It was still operated mechanically, but David knew the day would come, perhaps in his own lifetime, when mechanics would go into the discard, and visi-telepathy would, literally, be a meeting of minds. It was almost that now.

One knew when someone desired audience, for one could feel that one knocking at the door of the mind, as David had just felt it. It was strangely like a knocking at a tangible door. But one did not have to open, especially if one were the Chief Elder, as the first son of the first son of Haskup had always been. The ability to refuse admittance was almost exclusively the right and possession of the Elders, for lesser folk must open and admit the knocker—or rudely tell him to go about his business. Few did this, however, for there was so little else to do in Sanctuary, where life had reached such a boring state of perfection.

David, a man of ninety, with the fresh rosy cheeks of youth, sighed as he looked at the radio-psi-ring on the middle finger of his right hand. It was his symbol of power, passed on to him by his father. At first it had delighted him, filled him with a sense of being, of being master of Sanctuary. But the power had palled. It was so easy, so effortless. He scarcely knew the mechanical properties of the ring, save that it was redipactive, and that he had but to turn it on his finger, so that the "stone" was inside his palm. Then he had but to close his palm upon it, and the powerful waves of his mind sprayed forth from his body, commanded onto the radio-waves of the ring, to whatever part of Sanctuary he wished. Sanctuary had gone a long way in perfecting the machinery of the human mind. Ages ago man had used but one-fifth of his brain's power; now he used eighty percent of it,

but David doubted if increased knowledge and power had made Sanctuarium happy, though their state was so close to perfection.

"If we ever become absolutely perfect," he often thought, "we shall be the gods from whom we are supposed to have descended."

Yet he felt lonely, felt the need of a species of companionship. So, mentally bidding any who might have interrupted, to abstain from trespass upon the waves of his intellect, he turned the ring in his hand, closed his palm over it almost convulsively, almost desperately, as though it were a means of escape, and his lips moved over so little as he whispered:

"Now I wish to visit with them!"

The luxurious walls of his private room, into which, physically, not even his mate ever intruded, vanished from his sight as his eyes widened into an unblinking stare. Mists that might have been the mists of time came in to take the place of those walls—as though the waves of his thought were thus made visible, tangling themselves altogether before his eyes—and these spun and whirled with an eerie and amazing rapidity, forming, breaking apart, coalescing—while David waited in a fever of impatience.

AND then, in midair, before him, transmitted backward along the outward wave of his will, he saw the rectangular niches in the Columbarium of the Hsiuaps. He had never actually visited the place, and doubted if any of the Hsiuaps, even back to his great grandfather, had done so — except, of course, after they had died. Why should such a visitation take place when, by the will, one could bring, if not the material Columbarium, its astral image, complete to the minutest detail, into his own private room? That was one of the troubles with Sanctuary; one never needed to do anything one did not feel one possessed the energy to do.

He gripped the ring more firmly as the Columbarium began to take form, and he could see the ancient portraits on the faces of the niche-doors—the faces of the first sons of the first sons. They went back . . . well, now that all the niches were there for him to see, he counted them again, as though to assure himself. There were thirty-nine. He, David, was the fortieth in direct line of

descent. And there could be no doubt that this was so—for he so nearly resembled the others that his own portrait might have been used for the door of any given niche. Besides, for generations it had been impossible—even had anyone desired it—to deny paternity. Sanctuary had worked the thing out to the point where you never questioned paternity, you knew. Besides that, further, no woman would have thought of denying paternity to one man, ascribing it to another, for to tell something as true that was not, was impossible. The untruth was a legend. It couldn't be factual, never. One's lips, or even one's Visibile, might speak a lie, or try to, but the mind could not lie, and the truth went out along the waves of thought, side by side with the untruth—and any who cared to listen could examine the truth and the untruth, and know which was which without possibility of mistake.

He was, then, without question, the fortieth of his line.

Now, there in the air of his own indistinctly but eternally lighted room—dark only when he willed to shut the light from his eyes, but never dark in fact—his eyes played along the rectangular pictures, seeking, though he did not realize it until he came to it, the face of the ancestor David who had founded the United States, now composed of seven divisions that were so interlocked that, for all purposes, they were one. He understood that if the amalgamation had not taken place there would now be trouble, dissent, discord, but they were only words which he could scarcely envision as having any meaning. Dissent and trouble were forgotten in the mists of time.

"I wonder, David, you David who are back there thirty generations or so—so far back that you are scarcely a relative of mine, though but for you I never would have been here at all—what you think of us? Would you be dismayed if you could return and see how far up, or down perhaps, we have gone since your time? I doubt if you could grasp it, though there must have been times in your day when you were given mysterious secret glimpses into the future, visions beyond compare, and sight of us, away up here along the road of time, made you gasp with dismay—or perhaps with regret that you could not live to see

us? You died at ninety; I have scarcely begun to live at ninety, and the day I was twenty seems but yesterday, and already I am tired, and often I wonder if what we have invented and adapted for our comfort has been for our own good. But perhaps you know, at that. Or would you care for me to show you?"

Sometimes he allowed a whim of this kind to possess him. Then, retaining the Columbarium's oval shape, there in his room, basking its unheeding reflectors observe the marvels of Sanctuary, he would call up those marvels, one by one, explain it to The Ashes, sometimes almost making himself believe that the dead could see and hear. He had such a whim now, and, one by one, he produced those mysteries, bits and pieces, far scattered in fact, of Sanctuary before the sightless eyes of the past. He knew, even as he did so, that he did it not for his ancestors, but for self-assurance. He knew, but refused to admit it, even to himself. Besides, it was a way to pass the time that always hung heavily on the mind and body.

Sanctuary had, fifteen generations before, made an end of extending its frontiers. That had come about naturally when, for three generations there had been no further breaking-through, and the United States realized that there were no others left, anywhere within the walls, to break through. Those who had, and had become part of the Union, realized that two courses were open to them: to continue pushing back rocky frontiers, widening borders—or rendering the census static. It was just right for the population its walls inclosed when the answer was finally found.

"THE Elders got together," commenced the mind of David Haslop with his ancestors, "and put their minds to the task. Children would be born. No way had ever been found to prevent, that man could accept with a clear conscience. And children, born regularly to millions of couples, from the Upper Floor to the Fiftheth, far down, swelled the very walls of Sanctuary with their numbers, in spite of all that could be done. It was Jan Schmidt who showed the way to the answer. You will remember him, of course, except that this was the son of his age of his son, from that day back to your's."

"I think that, somehow," said Jan

Schmidt, "our answer lies in the powers of the Restoring Booths. We have all but perfected them now, beyond which they could not possibly go. No longer do we have individual Restoring Booths. All Sanctuary is a Restoring Booth. A man or a woman is hungry, or would be hungry if he or she delayed another second. But does he need to be conscious of his hunger to be fed? No. His innards hint of hunger to come, one second hence, and instantly he is replenished, wherever he may be in the Union—and he never even needs to think about it. Nor is there ever any waste, for he is replenished by exactly what his body requires. This is agreed?"

The Elders nodded gravely. This meeting had taken place before the Visiteles had been perfected, and the Elders were gathered together in the flesh.

"Then perhaps," said Jan Schmidt, "since the replenishing of our people is the continuation of their life, individually and as a nation, our methods of restoration are as close to life as are conception, gestation and birth. Ergo, they are allied with it in some manner."

The Elders nodded. Perhaps some of them had wrestled mentally with this problem for years.

"Let us then," said Jan Schmidt, "set our scientists a task. A child shall be born only when a man or woman dies, and its sex shall be that of the recently deceased. In this manner there will never be a problem of over-population, any necessity for increasing our frontiers."

One of the Elders was a man of humor. His face cracked in a grin.

"This is hardly an answer to our ancient destiny, is it? If we do not increase mightily, and wax fat in numbers, how can we ever burst out of Sanctuary, to regain the lands of our fathers, the abodes of the gods?"

The others smiled with this Elder, knowing that he jested, that he believed no more in the old myths than did they. It was an accepted thing. For centuries the Elders had worked their wills upon the people until it had become a tangible thing. And the first tenet of their law had been:

"Thou shalt not expand upward beyond the limits set by your fathers, even in the secrecy of your own dreams! The day will come, and when it does, you will know. There will be a sign. It may come

from one of your number."

So constant, mental and audible, down the ages, had been this unwritten command, that it had set its seal upon the people; had set its seal so firmly that even David himself, when, holding his breath, and questioning his own courage, he tried with his Vulture to penetrate the rocky veil aloft—inevitably failed. He told himself that he, never having seen those who lived outside, and therefore having no mental conception of them, failed only because they were beyond conception, and therefore outside the grasp of his great mind; but he didn't fool himself in the least.

The outside was the Unknowable. That was the long and short of it, the beginning and the end.

Reason told him, of course, that there was no such a place as the outside. For how could there be a cavern of limitless expanse, of suns hung in emptiness that would not fall. Pooh! It was silly.

But he was wandering from his design. He harked back to that fateful meeting.

"This control of population will not be a premonitory destruction of life, but merely a holding in abeyance," said Jan Schmidt. "If human bodies are replenished only according to their needs, and never more nor less, why cannot the principal be applied to the material boundaries of Sanctuary itself? A being dies, a being is born—the being permitted to be born being that one conceived nearest to the moment of death of the one whose going made possible the birth."

THE Elders agreed with Jan Schmidt, and the scientists found it a simple thing to work out, with the Restoring Booths, and the later general development of Sanctuary itself into one vast Restoring Booth as a point of departure.

The inhabitants of Sanctuary did not realize what had happened to them until it became general knowledge that for a year no one had been born in Sanctuary, except shortly after someone else had died. Then the Elders were called upon to explain, and did so. The people were delighted, of course—though some frivolous souls, when someone died, offered odds at gambling as to which part of Sanctuary would produce the child to take the place of the deceased. Some even tried to offer bets on individual par-

ents, but this was too great odds to succeed. Birth and death were in perfect balance. That was the trouble; everything tended to perfection, and thence, inevitably, to boredom.

Elders early found out that there could be no deviation from their static-population plan. Mates who so deeply adored each other that they wished to reproduce the image of one or the other, pleaded with the Elders for permission to conceive, and were invariably refused. An exception for one couple meant exceptions for many others, and ultimate defeat of their plan—and the compulsion, in spite of all, to widen the frontiers of Sanctuary. Nor could there be a favored couple arrangement.

"Someone dies, some one is born," the Elders said. "What could be fairer to all than that fate decide?"

Later they discovered that some change had to be made, else family trees would vanish. If a man died, it did not carry out his line very successfully if a child were born to take his place in some far corner of Sanctuary, to another family of whose very existence he had never been made aware.

So the scientists got to work again, and when a man died, or a woman, the child was born into his immediate family. Moreover, by popular agreement, a man's life was his own—as was a woman's—and if one were sufficiently desirous of projecting his own flesh into the future he could, by special dispensation, destroy himself and have a child by the woman of his choice. Few, however, did this. Few desired immortality strongly enough to die to possess it—a fact which David knew had been common to humanity from earliest times.

A man might believe in continuation, factional or spiritual, in an After Place of eternal happiness and perfection—but he lived as long as he possibly could in spite of his belief!

"You see," David said to The Ashes, "we have been forced—for the good of all, I believe—to take from mankind his greatest gift from the god: the ability to reproduce himself at will. And you'd question the sincerity of the Elders, if you were really here—and rightly, too!—if you knew that by special dispensation, Elders were exempt from this common law of Sanctuary! We desire immortality in our children, but we don't

think it necessary that the general public, regardless of this desire, need share it with us!"

It was a good personal jest, for the benefit of the whole.

"Now," said David, "look at certain other improvements. The shoes, for instance."

He dispelled the mental writhes of everything else, and showed some of the people, going about their business—which was one of movement, or rest, or both. The limit of their ability to move in the flesh was the dome of Sanctuary, and its basement. They rose or dropped at will. The cumbersome shoes had become the thinnest, most comfortable of sandals. The ancient Escalas were no more. The elevators were gone, and only their shafts remained. Even the ramps on which the Escalas had moved had been hewn away in the interests of beauty. And the elevator shafts which, in fact, were the columns that supported the roof of Sanctuary, were as sturdy, and no more, as required.

For ages past, Sanctuary had striven for beauty. In the minds of the Elders and Idealists of all grades, perfect beauty was a thing for which to strive. Where did they get their ideals? None had ever seen a sunset or a sunrise. None had ever seen a storm at sea. None had ever seen flowers in spring, or the snows of winter. None had ever seen the gaudy beauty of birds, or listened to their songs. Their art, their sculpture, were developed only from what their ancestors had remembered and, in Sanctuary from the dawn of the race, had seen and experienced. Their art, their architecture, their music, their ideals of beauty, were then, practically racial memories.

THERE were no birds in Sanctuary, save human ones, for the Elders had, when they had not much else to do, taken under advisement the fact that the voices of many of their people were harsh, and irritating. They gradually gave all of them, in varying degrees, voices of music.

They knew nothing of sunrises and sunsets, but they experienced with the lights of their ancient suns, with all the many gradations of fire upon countless metals from the rocks, and out of them made shift to enjoy sunrises and sunsets of their own. And who should say that they did not possess all that their ances-

tors had, since their light, down through countless ages, had come from the sun after all?

And light upon water! They had that, too.

And pigments, and paintings. The outside world would gaze breathless at what they could produce, if ever they saw it—and some day, perhaps, a million years hence, they would see these paintings—for master artists, working slowly, taking advantage of lights, shadows, almost even of sounds, had covered all the walls, all the floors, all the roofs, the elevator shafts, inside and out, with beauty beyond all imagining.

And perhaps the stone floors were hard, resisting and irritating to the feet that sometimes touched them lightly! Under the plans of builders they became soft, comfortable, and filled with colors to please the eyes. Rock floors remained rock, but rock into which the feet sank with human weight, in such a way as to delight the senses and cause walkers to sigh with satisfaction.

"And we experimented with the shapes of things," said David to The Ashes. "Look. Let me show you."

And there in the private room, sometimes to one side, sometimes almost superimposed upon the wealthy Columbarium—as though to hold it closer for their inspection—David Haslup showed his ancestors bits of Sanctuary. Columns of spidery construction, frail as a dream in appearance, strong as the rocks of the ages in actual fact. Curves done by artisans, curves that were made made visible. And seldom did a given curve or a gentle angle, repeat itself—so that Sanctuary, wherever one looked—was like the dream of a virginal saint. A feery cathedral alive with color, with music, with beauty and delight, all through which moved silently, gracefully beyond even the power of beauty to express, the inhabitants of Sanctuary.

They rose from the depths on invisible planks that, invisible though they were, were yet so beautiful that they clogged the throat with their delight. The faces of blindingly beautiful women—because the Elders had banished ugliness, at the request, of course, of delegations of women, down the generations!—of perfectly constructed men. Human beings so nearly divine that clothing, save for the almost invisible shoes, would have

been sacrilege.

They rose in myriads, softly. They descended in myriads, like dropping feathers. Seen against the heavenly gorgeousness of the pillars, the domes, the curves and the angles of Sanctuary they were, in fact, a scarlet of perfection—like divine music that could not be stopped.

They were butterflies against the light, with indescribably gorgeous wings that could not be seen, but that could be felt in the senses of those who—though they did not know it—had inherited racial memories of such beauties.

A dream cathedral . . .

But it was filled with boredom, because there was no progress possible. How could even the Elders of Sanctuary progress beyond perfection? Often David asked himself this, and found no answer.

He would never forget a certain day, twenty years before, when he had been sure he could no longer stand it, and Nala Zura, his wife, had had to soothe him to save his mind.

He had almost gone mad. He had shrieked in his private room until his madness had gone forth, even without the aid of his Visitate, to the psychic mind of Nala, and she had, having his wrath, refusing to accept the convention of Elder privacy in this emergency, entered to hear him screaming as he tore his hair.

LET our people rebel and break down the columns! Let them become angry with one another, and start a good, long fight! Let some great cataclysm come about that will shake Sanctuary—at least part of it—down around our heads! Let catastrophe come to numb our self-satisfied brains! Let some of the curves be broken, some of the heartbreakingly beautiful angles be destroyed—let something, anything, be done to bring discord, if only for a few moments, in order to break generations of boredom . . .”

He had gone on and on, with Nala holding his head against her breast at the last, terror in her voice as she spoke—until finally she said:

“If your Elders knew of this, that you have begged for catastrophe to come to Sanctuary—though who could possibly guess Whom you were addressing?—they would insist that you slay yourself, and your ashes would rest, finally, in the Black Columbarium!”

It was the Black Columbarium which sobered him. It was the one black “difference” in Sanctuary. It was horror, the forbidden, the outlawed and ghastly. And Nala Zura was right—and he never lost control again, for when he knew that he might, he deliberately, via his Visitate, brought the Black Columbarium into his private room, looked at it for a long time, forcing himself to realize all its hideous implications, shuddered, and was safe for a further time.

There were quite too many nameless and forgotten offenders in the Black Columbarium, and their grisly ashes would be hateful company through eternity.

But if, in spite of all—and through no initiative of David Hasup—something would happen . . .

There was an insistent knocking at the door of his mind, and now he decided to open. He’d spent enough time with The Ashes.

He banished the Hasup Columbarium with his will, and bade the knocker enter.

It was Jan Schmidt, and before he even “appeared,” David “heard” what he had come to talk about.

“There is mental revolt among us, David,” he grumbled. “If some steps are not taken, it may mean catastrophe for Sanctuary. And since the revolt is led, or at least encouraged, by the descendant of the second sons of Hasups, I, and the other Elders, believe you should do something about it! It is blasphemy, no less, a flying in the face of all our knowledge.”

David hoped his face did not brighten perceptibly. He hoped something would happen, and the thought that one of his own family was back of it secretly delighted him. But he closed the door of this shameful thought against the intrusion of Jan Schmidt, lest it be held against him by all the other Elders.

“What is the cause of this revolt?” he asked, while wishing Jan to appear.

“Boredom! Dissatisfaction with the current mode of life!”

“What form does the rebellion take?”

“A plan to break through to the outside. The rebels, of course, are iconoclasts.”

Inwardly David thought: “By The Ashes, I wish I were in on it. It won’t succeed, but it will be exciting. It won’t

succeed because there is, really, no such a place as outside—unless it is the place where the spirits of our dead reside."

And he shut the door of this thought against the telepathy of Jan Schmidt, too.

XIII

A STRANGE and awesome business, this telepathy; but when you come right down to it, everything else was strange and awesome. The fact that people had arms and legs shaped as they were, for instance. The facts of eyes, and noses, and bodies. Everything. And telepathy was simply a development of telepathy — which had been known, nebulously, from time immemorial.

Now, leading the mental knock, David had set his visuale into invisible motion, had released its power. That Jan Schmidt's visit was important there could be no doubt, else Jan would never have been so insistent, would never have interrupted his communing with The Ashes. It took courage to do that, for David, if irritated, might take from him the right to reproduce, which, in effect, was a sentence of death.

Now David concentrated on building the astral body of Jan Schmidt as he remembered it, helped of course by the answering telepathy of Jan himself. It was as though David opened a door to admit someone who helped him by also turning the knob, and helping to push back the portals.

Slowly, then more swiftly as David snapped out of the daze of his recent mystical communing, the form of Jan Schmidt came into being. He was, when seen close at hand—Jan Schmidt. That the actual, material Jan Schmidt was in some far place in Sanctuary merely added a filip to the proceedings. In everything except in the material of his body, Jan Schmidt entered the private room—which still remained private because the actual Jan was far away. Jan could talk with him, hear his voice, see him—but could not see any of his room save what David chose to show him.

There was Jan, immaterial as moonshine, yet apparently as material as the walls of Sanctuary—standing to face the

Chief Elder. David bade him seat himself, and for that purpose provided him with a soft telepathic divan, brought astrally from Jan's own home, so that Jan should have his own comfort with him. This was easy, because Jan, far away, was actually sitting on that couch as he twisted his own televisi-ring into his palm.

Jan saw David, smiled grimly, greeting him. David saw Jan. But if anybody had looked in, with the eyes of the flesh, upon the conference, that one—without his own televisi-ring—would have seen only David, sitting there alone in utter silence, staring at the blank wall of his private room.

But it didn't lack reality, that conference, because of the unimportant lack of corporeality on the part of Jan Schmidt. Nor, far away in Jan's home, did the person of David Hadup lack substance in the mental eyes of Jan Schmidt.

"Now," said David — no corporeal ears could have heard a thing, nor seen movement of David's lips, "what's this all about?"

"I've been trying to tell you, Dave," said Jan testily. "That radical relative of yours is stirring up trouble. He's recruiting doubters, some of them women, to his standard."

"Standard? You mean he's forming an army, after the manner of our ancestors, when they were gods and fought among themselves?"

"Now, now, I'm talking in figures of speech, of course. But Frank Hadup is telling his friends—all who'll listen—that he's going to find out whether there's such a place as outside, either prove that there is, or that there isn't. It's time, in the tenor of his remarks, that the veils of legend, of hypocrisy, were torn away to let people see . . ."

"Sometimes," interrupted David, "I think things like that myself—secretly and privately of course."

"But do you realize, Dave, what this may mean? People are beginning to believe him, to rally to him—not because they have faith in any new-fangled notions, but because it's a chance to do something, a new topic of conversation, something to experience."

"I can't see any harm in it. He'll hammer his head against the rocks, literally and figuratively, without success. You and I are men of experience and

judgment, Jan. We know that though he may actually succeed in progressing upward beyond the ancient limits set by our people, even of going further into the east than we've ever dared believe we could—he'll go on into eternity without ever succeeding in doing anything but leaving a tunnel behind him. Let it be! It will be a monument to the fatality of rebellion against existence. We can show it, even to all future generations, who may get like ideas, as proof that they're doomed to failure if they try to know the Unknowable."

"GRANTED, Dave, but there's something else. His followers increase. It is a threat—and you'll come to realize it some day—against your authority in particular, ours in general. Even if he does nothing else he may start discord, which is unthinkable and I thought until recently, impossible. He has to be stopped."

"But how! People have been guided for generations by their own knowledge of what is the greatest good to the greatest number, and therefore most beneficial to the individual. We've never told a man he couldn't do anything, you know."

"Well, we can always start, can't we?"

"Yes, if you insist, but I'd like to talk it over with the other Elders first."

Jan looked chagrined. It was as though David had questioned his sincerity and his report. David hastened to reassure him, and the hard face of Jan Schmidt indicated that he chose to be mollified.

"I merely think, from your own report, that this is important enough to call for a general conference. Thus I make you a compliment. Besides, since Frank is of my own family, I prefer that people not related to me share in any possible decision as to what is to be done. What, before I call the conference, is your idea about that?"

"Warn him, Dave. If he refuses to heed, the Elders as a body warn him. If he refuses to heed that, ask the majority in Sanctuary to express itself, for or against. If all these fail . . ."

Jan took a deep breath, obviously hating himself and what he proposed, yet doggedly holding to what he considered his duty.

"If these fail," he repeated, "the an-

cient punishment! After almost thirty generations, a Hasdrup is condemned to coventry and the Black Columbarium."

David's face expressed his shock. This was serious, more serious than he could have thought possible.

"I'll get the others."

He held his palm tightly over the televisual ring, sent out his request, simultaneously, to the other twenty-three Elders. He could as easily, because there was no possibility of glut on the waves of thought, have summoned everyone in the United States of Sanctuary.

One by one the Elders opened the doors of their minds to his summons that had once been as mystical, was now as commonplace.

They ranged themselves beside Jan Schmidt. They exchanged greetings with one another. None gave a thought to the rather miraculous fact that no two of them were closer together than a hundred miles—each Elder being overlord of a twenty-fifth part of all Sanctuary, with his private room in the geographical center of his own domain. The fact just was, and there was an end on't.

"Tell them, Jan," said David.

Jan looked embarrassed, and David got it right away. Jan had talked the thing over with each and all of the Elders before he had "come to" David. He was, in effect, their spokesman, and they were already all in accord.

Understanding this, David said: "What would you have me do? As Jan suggested?"

They nodded, those twenty-five most powerful men in Sanctuary, under David Hasdrup.

"But have you any objection to a personal amendment by me, provided it is accompanied by a promise on my part to carry out your wishes if it does not prove to be a solution?"

"What is it, David?" asked George Blake, when Jan Schmidt said nothing.

"LET the young fools have their heads. Let them try to reach the outside. The higher they go, I'm thinking, the harder they'll fall—figuratively, of course, as nobody has fallen in Sanctuary for generations. Let the Unknowable itself bring about their failure if, after all my attempts at persuasion—which I promise to exert—they insist on going ahead. Let them go, and fail, and

they will be satisfied. Prevent them, and they'll think we're afraid for what they believe to be the truth, to get out."

"What do you think they think the truth is?" asked Jan.

"I can guess. They think if there is an outside, its time we know about it. That there may be fire behind the smoke of our oldest legends. That if there's nothing at all, the sooner we know of it, and stop babbling of its mystery, the happier we'll all be. Well?"

"Go ahead," said Jan. "But if nothing solves the problem, and the people become unruly, or too emotionally stirred up . . ."

"We can decree that any violation of the symmetry of Sanctuary, calls for sentence to the ancient punishment!"

"But young Frank insists that where he will begin his experiment is part of his own property! That his family is responsible for its improvement, development, beauty—that if he mars it it's nobody's affair but his own."

"Which would seem to indicate," said David, "that when we decided that ownership was vested in the family rather than the state, we made a mistake."

"And, helike, a fatal one," said Jan Schmidt. "Fortunately, we, the Elders, can change that with a word. But if we do . . . well, Frank himself has brought it about, you see? Forced the hands of the Elders-in-Conference. See where the danger lies? The first doubt cast upon our authority."

"I'd still like to carry out your wishes with my own reservations," said David.

They nodded. Abruptly, and without apology, David turned his televisi-rings so that the "stone" was atop his finger. Then, waiting for a moment, to cast off the feeling of depression caused by the conference, he turned it inward again. His palm, that grasped the stone, trembled with a growing fear he refused determinedly to admit, even to himself.

Then, his lips a straight line, he knocked mentally at the door of the mind of Frank Hasup, eldest, save for David, of the sons of David's father.

Minutes passed. Terror began to mask the face of David Hasup. Never in his life had anybody in Sanctuary kept the door of his mind closed against the Chief Elder.

But more minutes passed, and still there was no answer.

David knew that Frank was deliberately refusing to talk with him by Visi-tale. He hesitated for several minutes longer, his body trembling, his mind suddenly heavy with the first hint of foreboding he had ever known.

Then he knocked on another door, the door of the hereditary-military. An honorary title, this man's. It hadn't been active, because it hadn't been needed, for centuries. The man's—whose face didn't look so surprised as David had expected, which indicated, he thought, that Selig had been expecting, and dreading, the summons—astral form appeared.

"Selig," said David, "produce in my presence the person of my brother, Frank?"

"Immediately!" said Selig, with militant gravity that would have caused the first General Selig to nod his head with grim satisfaction.

XIV

IT was not until the wait began for the appearance of his brother that David began to realize the cataclysmic significance of what he was about to do. No wonder Jan Schmidt had been grave about it! No wonder that the Elders had demurred, had all talked it over before bringing the matter to his attention. No wonder . . . why, when he came to think the matter over, nobody within his lifetime had ever faced the Elders or any one of them, especially the Chief Elder, as the object of criticism.

Why should anybody be criticized for anything in Sanctuary? What did it matter to anyone else what anyone did, since nobody was ever inspired to do anything to interfere with the welfare of Sanctuaricians? Each individual realized, as had his parents before him for generations, that in being true to his social obligations, he was the truest to himself. Anything against them was . . . was . . . like, well like trying to lift yourself by your sandals.

It was unthinkable that a Sanctuarician should be called onto any Elder's carpet, there to listen to words indicative of any offense he had committed against his fellows. No Elder ever remonstrated with even his own children, because children, with their first consciousness, were admi-

tensely inoculated with knowledge of right and wrong, and the desire, nay, the inner necessity, of doing right only, because thereby they made their own happiness more secure.

How could such a thing happen in a country where only happiness and contentment abode?

David Haslup, asking himself these questions, ran his hand across his furrowed brow. It came away wet with some sort of moisture. He stared at his wet hand. By the Ashes, what had caused this dampness of his flesh? He'd never had it before. He'd never known anyone else to have it. Oh, yes, he had, too. Nala Zura, the day she had soothed him when he had thought himself going mad. She had been mentally disturbed, upset, and the moisture had covered her cheeks. He remembered it now.

And this? Why, the moisture must have some connection with his inner, growing turmoil. Amazing! Here were alchemies inside him that he had never dreamed were a part of him. Inner mental upset, to which his skin reacted by exuding water! There was a salivade, perhaps a sickness, about which he would have to talk with his closest friends, about which he'd have to talk with someone at least, since he couldn't decide just who, among the Elders, he would select to listen to his recital.

He took his mind off the skin-moisture, and put it back on the problem of young, impetuous Frank—the lad who couldn't be satisfied with absorbing the old books; who couldn't be satisfied within the confines of Sanctuary, no matter how fast or strenuously he traveled. Maybe, he thought dubiously, some concession would have to be made to men like Frank, and to his followers. Maybe the ban would be lifted against widening the horizons of Sanctuary. But, no, that would upset the delicate equilibrium of the place. That would be no solution. It would, in effect, make Frank the cause of changing everything in the nation; would, actually, make him too important for a second son.

Frank Haslup! His own brother! To have any Sanctuarian brought before him had been unthinkable before Jan Schmidt had knocked on the door of his mind. But his own brother, a Haslup, son of a Chief Elder! The more he thought of it the more cataclysmic it be-

came. No wonder the Elders were numb with it!

To take his mind off it—because he wasn't sure but what it might make him lose control again, Sanctuarian minds being so delicately balanced, because almost all of them were used now—he got to thinking of the books. Sanctuary had a vast library. There were books, metal records of things actually told, so that one had but to turn them on to hear them. The library contained all manner of information, that could be passed on in many ways.

The most approved way, however, did away with the tedium of listening, the boring process of reading. For all books, all records, were an emanation of a mind, or a meeting of minds. So, nobody knew just when—at least David didn't, as he had never absorbed a book that recorded the matter—information became part of individual knowledge by absorption rather than by auditory or visual means. It was very simple, when you came right down to it. Recored photographs were part of the frontispiece of every book, infinitely small. Part of each book was an individual, tiny, photographic instrument, with eyepiece and electrical forehead contact, whereby a "reader" could look through the eye-piece, rest his head upon the contact, and have the entire contents of the books photographed upon the indestructible membranes of the brain, etched forever upon the memory. It did away with all possibility of forgetting, yet left the book for calmer, slower perusal if the reader wished—as so many did, because it passed time easily that so often hung heavily on the hands.

THERE was no limit to education. In ten or fifteen years—mere moments in the stream of time, a small fraction of the human life-span—one man could absorb every last book in the United States of Sanctuary. Plenty of men had done exactly that, for want of other things to do. Sanctuary had plenty of individuals who knew all humanity itself knew, and could call it up for discussion whenever they wished.

It was no longer miraculous.

Photography itself . . . why, it was possible, as all the Elders knew, though they did not release the knowledge, and would not permit it to be done in any case—for religious reasons—to integrate

the individuals photographed, in the flesh, with no effect on the original whatever! It wasn't done, for one sound reason, because individuals could then be repeated endlessly, filling the Union with Haslups, Schmiedts, and anybody else! Might as well allow Sanctuarians to continue the reproduction of their own kind.

The religious reason was the one the Elders all agreed on, choosing to overlook the possibilities of multiple production of humanity via photography. And the religious reason! The portraits of dead and gone Elders, set eternally in the doors of the niches which looked away their ashes, could be photographed—and those Elders brought to life in the flesh! That, of course, was unthinkable. No telling where it might end. David could, if he wished, restore the very first Haslup, and talk to him face to face about his time. But if he did, the other Elders would wish to restore their own ancestors. And if this were done, what excuse could they offer other Sanctuarians for not restoring all their dead? Then what of the population problem?

All of Sanctuary's generations, brought back to life!

Naturally, there was another consideration. If David, for example, restored his own dead father, that one would be Chief Elder of Sanctuary, by right of birth—until his father were restored, and so on back to the first David who, if restored, would go right on ruling as he had been when he had died.

So, they clung to authority and allowed the dead to rest on.

"I have to think of something," David told himself miserably, "or go mad. Something tells me that when Frank arrives a new era, and an unfortunate one, will be beginning in Sanctuary—has already begun!"

For the first time in generations, uncertainty had come into the family of Haslup, and was destined through its head—and thus through all the Elders—to affect every native.

Frank Haslup came in ahead of Selig. David instructed Selig to depart, and to abstain from visitelepathing what went on between Frank and himself. Immediately he felt an inner shock, because he had found it necessary to warn a Sanctuarian against eavesdropping! Things had come to a pretty pass indeed!

Frank Haslup grinned at his brother

with hearty good humor.

"Well, old son?" he said.

David didn't smile. Frank went on. "Oh, don't be stuffy, just because you're the big boss, Dave. We're brothers, after all, even though you, being the eldest son, never have any fun. Let's hear the bad news."

"Frank," said David sternly. "I've brought you here forcibly because you refused to heed me when I visitelepathed you. I suppose you know why?"

"I sincerely hope so!"

"You hope so!" repeated David in amusement.

"I certainly do! To be the first Haslup in generations to be criticized! To be found sufficiently out of the wearisome rut as to merit personal reprimand! It's glorious, and I hope it's true! I'm somebody—the first in Sanctuary since only our divine ancestors know when! Or are the ancestors of second sons divine?"

"Frank, you are sacrilegious!"

"Whoops, David! I was right! Look what I'm called! The first in ages to be told such a hideous thing! I'm a stand-out . . ."

"You're a disturbing influence who must be restrained!"

"Better and better! A disturbing influence, the first within the memory of man. I must be restrained. How many generations have endured since anyone had to be restrained? I haven't seen the answer in any books, but I shall hunt and find out, and absorb the answer, and gloat over it."

DAVID did a strange thing. He slammed his closed fist hard against his other palm, and raised his voice to his brother.

"Silence, sir, while I tell you what I am forced to tell you. You are hereby commanded to desist from subversive utterances, oral or telepathic. You will go no farther in the formation of a group dedicated to the matter of visiting the forbidden outside."

Pure joy masked the face of Frank Haslup, who looked enough like his handsome elder brother to be his twin.

"By the Ashes, this is superb. I shall be the first to disobey as well! I have stirred the Elders, including the Chief! What more could any man want! My joy at the knowledge merely serves to prove my own contention. I'm happy, so

happy I could cry out, wordless, like a song—which proves to me that it's what I need, what all Sanctuary needs, and which I shall tell them they need."

"And that, sir?"

"Change! Excitement! Trouble! Hardship! Absorb a few hooks, my sanctimonious brother, and understand what I mean by the words. And get this through your routine-dedicated skull: if I die this instant, a new era has come to the United States of Sanctuary!"

"Then you refuse to obey me, your brother and Elder?"

"Why should I? Give me a straight answer to that. Because Elders have always been obeyed? I refuse to accept that as the answer without logical proof in words that cannot be gainsaid. Why have they always been obeyed? Nobody has even thought to ask the question, until now. They've just accepted the established order of things. And I'm not doing it any more."

"You're mad . . . mad!"

"I hope so, with all my heart. I hope so . . . hope so . . . for now I can't foresee the future, which is a delightful thing. Hitherto I have always known that tomorrow, and all other tomorrows, would be the same as today and all my yesterdays. Now, uncertainty—and a feeling of joy beyond words."

"Mad! Mad!"

"Happy, brother, happy!"

"Nothing that I can do will change you!"

It just occurred to David that there was nothing, really, he could do to force obedience from this brother of his—nothing that he could really do to his own flesh and blood, and live with his conscience afterwards.

Frank Haslop became grave for the first time.

"Forgive me, Dave . . . Gee, even that expressed wish is something new in Sanctuary, where nobody ever has to ask forgiveness from anybody, because nobody ever does anything calling for forgiveness! . . . but I don't wish to distress you too much. I'll do all I can to make you easy mentally; at the same time I shall prosecute my plans as much as I can without disturbing you."

David sat but flung his hands above his head.

"And what will you tell the Elders, if I get them together?"

Frank grinned implicitly—and David had never loved him as he loved him now, as he grinned—and wagged his head philosophically.

"They've all taken a crack at me already, singly, in groups, and in fets. They were trying to settle me without bringing the matter directly to your attention."

"I see," said David sadly. "Well, cause as little disturbance as possible, and go ahead on your plan—to certain, inevitable failure!"

Frank looked grave for a moment, then leaned toward his brother.

"Is anyone listening, Dave?" he asked.

David turned his visicle-ring into his palm, remained absorbed for a second or two, then answered.

"No one listens."

"Then I'll speak my mind, Dave. I know, as well as I know anything, that you'd like to be in my shoes this minute—and you secretly hope that I turn the smug, national self-satisfaction of Sanctuary wrong side out!"

NATURALLY, David could not answer such a blasphemous charge. But he knew it was true, even though the frown of his high displeasure stabbed at the back of his stalwart brother, as Frank—daring to ask permission, again becoming a Sanctuarian "first"—quit the private room of David.

David Haslop chuckled silently, and his eyes were alight with a deep secret pleasure.

Then he started, listened guiltily on his waves of thought—having forgotten that his visicle-ring was still grasped in his palm—and sighed with relief to discover that no one had captured his secret thought.

But reason reasserted itself at once, and he became grave as thoughts piled in on him—thoughts of what Frank's rebellion would do to Sanctuary; thoughts of the firm stand the Elders would take in the end, visiting the ultimate punishment on Frank Haslop.

A thoughtless foot had stepped upon the beauty of Sanctuary. A careless hand had tramped into discord the music of her idyllic existence.

And not even the gods of their fathers could tell them where it might finally end.

XV

WHEN David discovered that Frank Hensup had made arrangements to begin his experiment on the western boundary he sighed with relief. There would be little trouble, after all. Frank, by selecting the western border as his starting place, had managed to avoid one of the taboos of the founding fathers. They, the fathers, had said that, "beyond this limit, to the east, ye shall not go!"—so Frank had started in the west where no such commands applied.

And the fathers had said: "Higher than the limits already gone by us, ye shall not go!"—so Frank was not going upward at all. Thus, he disobeyed no one whomsoever.

"If he'd started eastward," thought David, "there might be cause for worry, for the Hensups and other Elders of old thought there might be something forbidden, or terrifying, or downright dangerous in that direction, else no such law would have been laid down. The same with going upward. But to the west . . . well, in all probability that is one direction in which there can be no question that only our infinite walls stretch on to on to . . . on to . . . infinity."

Just the same, there began an endless buzzing in the hive, more activity and excitement than had been recorded anywhere in the old books. Women caught the excitement, as did the men and children, and even the Elders, reluctantly, admitted to a certain growing excitement in their own staid breasts.

There was some effort in the beginning to persuade Frank to go no further with his mad scheme, in whose prosecution he had the help of scores of sturdy Sanctuarious of his own age. But this came to nothing. Frank, feeling that David had given tacit consent along with his warnings, ignored the persuasive ones. And nobody thought to use force. No Sanctuarious had ever actually laid his hands on anyone in anger—not even bothersome children, because, in Sanctuary, children were never bothersome, and were handled as scientifically as everything else. Children, naturally, erred for reasons of their own. By investigation of their mentalities—which suffered things for which the babies, as

yet, had no words, but only impulses—scientists had long since diagnosed such impulses and provided remedies. So, children never erred, because they never had reason. It might, perhaps, have been better if, no occasion, the wild screams of children had been heard in the city of perfection.

So nobody thought to dissuade Frank by force. Frank, however, did listen to the request of his fellow-countrymen in certain particulars. He would, as soon as he had gone into the rock sufficiently, fill in behind himself—on the off-chance that, if he really did break through into horror, it could not back-track him and burst forth about the luckless heads of Sanctuary.

Frank, laughing, agreed, and when David televised him, shocked his elder brother by saying: "Now I know there's something outside. For don't you see, David? Just as I'm going into a little world of my own, from Sanctuary, and shut off from it, so may the first Sanctuarious have come from some outside place—never since recovered—into Sanctuary. By their chance request of me I am convinced that this is so, and that I shall make amazing discoveries before I return."

David longed to go with him, longed to learn the intricacies of the machinery by which Frank was traveling swiftly through the rocks. That machinery was not cumbersome or inefficient, for Frank, fortifying himself in every possible particular, had absorbed every book he could find on the subject of mining-engineering, paleontology and the like. He studied every conceivable instrument kept in the museum of Sanctuary since they had been abandoned when Sanctuary was to widen its horizons no farther. Thus he garnered all that humanity knew about stresses and strains, about the secrets of the rocks, about power, lines of force, inertia, gravity.

AND the instrument he invented, adapted from every bit of usable information he could find, was perfect for Frank's purpose. It was a tiny metal steel—of which he made several score extra, in case of need—in whose alloys reposed the power and direction of the broken-atom, the speed of light, the ultimate drawing power of the magnet, the destructive force of all known explosives

—and light by which to guide himself. Its principle was reasonably simple. If endless messages could travel on a single thought wave, endless information on radio waves, why could not all force reside in a single piece of metal, compounded of all the necessary metals in reduced alloy?

Frank had started on that assumption, and his steel was the most modern implement of dynamic power man had so far produced.

With it, literally, he opened doors of stone.

When he was ready to start, he communicated with David by television.

"Want to watch your renegade brother take a walk through the walls, Dave?"

"I still warn you . . .," began David.

"I still refuse to heed, though I listen and see, David. Of course, you understand, I could, by use of the etheric flow, walk directly through the rock in the hutting of an eye, but that would be too fast, and I want to see all there is to see. Ragged things, David, not the symmetrical perfection of Sanctuary. I'm going to open the doors of the mountains, see what keeps them locked, and how . . ."

"You are my brother, Frank," said David. "I shall watch. I'll even wish you well, for all the trouble you've caused us. But I ask you one favor, Frank."

"Yes?"

"Keep your progress secret from everybody else in Sanctuary. I don't wish everybody to be stirred up."

"Okay, Dave. Just thee and me, then."

And Frank, with his followers, began their journey through the western walls. Through his knowledge of paleontology and geology, Frank was enabled, by studying a given facing, to estimate to a fine mathematical certainty, just how its grain ran, how its strata lay. Some rocks took longer to give out their secrets, some a shorter period of time. But Frank made few mistakes, and the steel did the work. The smallest creature, man, could move the largest thing in creation easily—huge blocks of stone. All he needed as a beginning, was an empty space into which to spill the detritus of his journey behind him.

By agreement he was allowed to shoot a tunnel, or shaft, into the western wall for a distance of half a mile. During the construction of this, Sanctuarians of both

sexes and all ages were allowed to visit him and his friends at their work.

But when, having penetrated an area of black basalt, Frank came to a great rampart of stratified rock, which some cataclysm had upended, so that the strata were vertical, he televised David.

"Now, old son, it really begins. I'm stopping the back track today. When and if I come back, tomorrow, next day, or ten years hence, I have only to put things back where I found them, and everything will be as solid as ever!"

David was still dubious, though proud of the success, so far, of his brother.

"Now, David," said Frank who, with his helpers, were massed in the shaft facing, from which they had now banished all curious Sanctuarians, "watch the doors swing open!"

Frank measured, with a glance, the height and width of the tunnel behind him. Then he drew an invisible height-limit on the face of the stratified rock ahead with the point of the steel, a height-limit even with the floor of the shaft. Then, while his comrades watched and held their breaths, and David forgot to be afraid, Frank brought the full power of the steel into play. He held the tip of it in the center of thorough rectangle he had marked, turned on the force, and calmly pulled out of the wall of rock a segment of amazingly great cubical content, the limits he had marked being two lines of cleavage, the natural stratification the other two—the length being controlled simply by the extent, ahead, of the stratified layer.

It was as though he had pulled a hook off a shelf, from where it had stood for ages between two other hooks.

And he left the mighty segment in the shaft. There was room enough on either side of it to allow for passage of Frank and his comrades. They circled about the mighty segment, then set it at an angle across the shaft, so that none not possessed of the stroke of force could possibly get past it. Thus, to all human, material eyes, Frank and his men vanished into the face of the rocks.

Beyond the stratified wall he came to another stratified wall, this one lying so that the strata were horizontal. Frank removed this as, again, the hand would disentangle hooks piled in a heap, sorting them out, clearing the way.

And there were areas of rocks of all kinds. With the stole Frank merely moved them out of the way. He traveled swiftly, almost, as a man could walk, his followers, who never faltered, keeping at his back.

Two days passed before David became aware of the fact that the shape of Frank was becoming blurred, his thought difficult to grasp without constant repetition. And Frank, in a fever of haste, had no time for that. So, it did not surprise David when, at the end of the fourth day of opening doors which had never been opened since the building of the mountains began, Frank calmly ignored David's knocking on the door of his mind.

Frank and his friends had vanished, beyond all contact.

And their going was a subject of discussion that would not be talked out. Every time David used his televisi-rings, every wave of thought in Sanctuary was clogged with the gabble of men and women who discussed only Frank and his followers, and speculated as to their success.

David thought, somewhat wryly, that if Frank did not come back during the present generation, he probably would, in course of time, become a "god" in his turn, about whom all sorts of false legends would be woven. The idea amused David exceedingly.

He tried to get the minds of Sanctuarines off the experimenting voyagers, by closing the entrance to the shaft and pointing it over so that no trace remained. For if Frank did come back, he would come through the rocks as easily as he had gone.

David clung, mentally, to his last picture of Frank traveling through the rocks, with his intrepid companions at his back—companions provided with the most modern of the discarded Restoring Boats, for the replenishing of the travelers as they journeyed — and was very proud. Frank, a mere human, opening doors so huge, to look upon black emptiness. It was as though a man no bigger than the end of a hair, forcibly opened the backs of humans. David couldn't blot from his mind the contrast of Frank with the "doors" he opened.

A pygmy, calmly opening doors to the houses of giants.

Days passed. Weeks. But instead of

discussion about Frank and his followers decreasing, it increased. No messages came back to anyone, but thought waves could not be killed entirely, and faint impulses were being constantly received from the travelers, proof that they, or part of them lived—and in a state of constant, high pitched excitement.

They were far, far distant in the massive walls.

David wished there were some way that these faint emanations—which were constantly and swiftly going fainter, but which would not die out while Frank's party lived and thought—could be stopped. But there was no way of doing that. Power could not be rendered nil, and thought waves were power. And by their very nature, they could not be changed into something else.

Added to his troubles was the fact that certain of Sanctuary's scientists were trying to perfect instruments which would keep them in contact with Frank's expedition indefinitely, and they were amazed when the Elders asked them to desist—refusing calmly, as they had a right to do, because the Elders were encroaching upon their personal rights.

DAVID would have preferred for all Sanctuary to believe that Frank's entire expedition had perished. That was a hopeless desire, and he knew it, for all had left mates behind them, or prospective mates, who would not voluntarily give them up until they themselves lay down to die.

So, there was nothing to do but wait for developments—and always, for weeks, the fainter-growing emanations from the minds of the expedition came back through the miles and miles of stone. It was weird, uneasy, and nothing could be done about it. Frank could have stopped it, simply by willing it, but Frank was thoughtless, or too excited by the experiences through which he was going, to do anything about it.

So the hive, Sanctuary, remained in buzzing turmoil.

Four months after Frank had gone there was a sudden, excited knocking on his mental door. Wondering what had gone wrong now, he bade the knocker "enter."

"Frank!" he gasped, when the outline, horribly, fearfully vague, but still unmistakable, of his brother appeared.

"Yes, David. We're coming to something, something strange, and *older* and, I think, mundane and human. However, I am taking no chances with the lives of my comrades. I started this. I'll risk any possible dangers. I am leaving my men behind me when I pass through to—whatever lies beyond. I am leaving each with two stoles. When I pass through, the way will be closed behind me, and I shall be on my own. If I do not return, they are to return to Sanctuary, and keep their mouths forever closed about what they have seen."

"Impossible!" said David.

"Yes, but true. Goodbye for a little while, David, or maybe for eternity. And listen, old fellow, no matter what faces me beyond, I am happier than I had ever thought possible for anyone to be happy. If I die when I leave you, and know it this instant, it would but serve to season my happiness with additional happiness!"

"You're mad, mad . . ." said David.

But Frank had withdrawn, "closing the door . . ."

For the first time since the departure of the expedition, no emanations whatever came from any of its members. This seemed to be very strange, when David knew that Frank's followers were safely locked in the rock. But then it came to him. Frank had commanded them to lock the doors of their minds against possible intrusion by enemies! Enemies—of even The Ashes probably did not know what kind—might overtake their thoughts and discover their hiding place.

So there was—simply nothing. Just silence, for what seemed to be an eternity.

During its prolongation David scarcely slept, exchanged no words even with Nala Zera. He was conscious that Sanctuary had at last given up the entire expedition for dead, and that the Elders, without even discussing the matter with David, had arranged for Sanctuary to forget. Even forgetting was scientifically done. As memory could be indelibly affixed in the human mind by mental-photography, so images of remembered things, matters, people, could be erased.

So the Elders erased from the minds of Sanctuary all memory of Frank and his expedition. Frank's mate took another mate for herself. The mates of the others consoled themselves with others—

though it was not a matter for consolation, actually, because none of the women knew she had ever had any reason for sorrow.

Only David refused to accept the offer of forgetfulness. He knew that his brother lived, and his comrades with him. Yet he did not tell the other Elders so, did nothing to prevent their mates from taking up with others, because the Elders, and David knew it, were wise in what they did.

Forgetfulness was the only way. When, and if, the expedition returned, adjustments could be made smoothly, without pain—as though nothing untoward had ever happened.

But for the fact that men no longer gave thought to food for the body—that it was something sciences did for him without his very knowledge—David would not have eaten, or allowed himself to be replenished, because he would not have thought of it. His whole thought was for his brother Frank—earnestly as to his fate.

Yes, and a still growing fear. Something terrible must have befallen Frank, to keep him silent for so long. That he must have encountered something too vast for conception, so big it numbed even the brain of Frank himself, David took for granted.

And yet he was curious, too—hoped for Frank's ultimate return with all his heart, even though his return, and the information he might bring, might revise all Sanctuary's concepts on the nature of things.

Something deep down inside him told him that Frank had started back, long before there was actually any contact with Frank by the Visibles.

And terror, perhaps madness—whispered this deepdown something—was returning through the ageless rocks with Frank Hadup.

XVI

DAVID tried to televise Frank as his brother approached Sanctuary, coming swiftly closer and closer. But Frank was stubborn. He obviously knew that David wished to talk with him before he actually got back, and was insistent that he should not. The

fast frightened David. There was something to hide; something to be talked over, anyhow. And David knew that Frank returned alone.

He knew when Frank entered Sanctuary, and how good Frank felt to be home again. He also knew that nobody paid Frank the slightest heed, because nobody remembered him, that to every living person he was a total stranger.

Then Frank reached the house of his elder brother, and, approaching the door, televised him for the first time.

"May I come into your private room? It's important."

David agreed, and willed the door open. Frank came in quietly, sat down without asking for or awaiting permission, took a deep breath and looked at his brother.

"It's tough," he said.

"What is?"

"To explain the never-seen to the man who had never seen it, in words he can understand. Take this great rock in which Sanctuary is located."

"Yes?"

"Think of a lift, or an equality in the floor of it, anywhere."

"Yes, I can think of that. It's easy. Well?"

"Not well, either. This mountain we live in is itself such an inequality, or raised place! It's just a bump on the floor of a cavern big beyond all conception whatever!"

David studied his brother. Frank was searching David's face, to see whether he had managed to convey the slightest idea of what he had seen—and was disappointed. David hadn't got it. David was studying, concern in his face, the face of a man who must be slightly crazy to tell such impossible things, expecting a man of intelligence to believe him.

"We can go outside," said Frank. "I think it would be better for us all. It widens our horizons beyond belief. And there we could expand. We could have children again. I'd like one. I imagine my mate has forgotten. Didn't see her, but otherwise she'd have met me. The Elders have put the forgetting device to work, which I expected. But their work can be undone—and must be, except where the mates of the men who went with me are concerned."

Frank's hand was trembling. That strange exultation of water David had

once seen on Nala Zara's face, and experienced but once on his own, came now from the cheeks of his brother.

"Why?" said David, afraid to hear the answer.

"They're all dead. I'd have been dead myself, but they rescued me. They gave their lives for me. Those lives were well-spent, David, if Sanctuary is allowed to benefit as I think she should."

"Scores of dead men, Frank," David's voice shook as though he had the ague, "and Sanctuary will say I'm protecting you because you are my brother. I want the Elders to hear, to decide what Sanctuary shall be told. You were outside, you say, in a cavern under. . . ."

His eyes steadfastly fixed on Frank, David surreptitiously slipped the televisor-ring into his palm, grasping it like a drowning man, tugging in on the brain of Frank Haslop. Frank grimaced tightly.

"Yes, I'm telling the truth," he said, "and my mind is all right. Satisfied?"

David shook his head, almost imperceptibly. Frank seemed to be telling the truth, according to the televisor-ring; but that might well be because he himself believed what he had seen. He might be telling a falsehood he himself thoroughly believed in. Old books furnished information about such things. Obsessions, they were called.

David televised the Elders, told them to hurry to his room in person. Frank's face didn't change as he waited. Realizing that David wanted all to hear it, he kept silent for the most part. David watched his brother, appalled at the change in him. The lad was quieter, possessed of a vaster strength, outward and inward. David didn't think he liked the as he had gone into the rock sufficiently. change. Frank had hardened. And something had dulled his mind. The televisor-ring told him that.

THE Elders came, their faces grave when they noted the gravity on the face of David, the whiteness of the face of Frank Haslop. They sat and waited. David said, quietly:

"This is, in a way, a searching-out. A trial of my brother's sanity, his degree of responsibility for the deaths of eighty nine men. We will now listen, Frank. Begin at the point where you say you broke through."

"I pulled back a last segment of

rock," said Frank, knowing very well what was in the minds of the Elders, "and broke through into a cavern beyond conception. It is occupied by people, human beings like us, except that they are smaller, and their skin is yellow-brown."

Frank paused, as though to gather strength to continue. He searched each face in turn, seeking belief and trust.

"I had the good sense to avoid being seen, until I could manage to dress as they did. They are not like us. I could understand nothing they said . . . and now, I scarcely know where to begin. Perhaps it will be best to start with their buildings . . . no, the boundary of the cavern they lived in. It's a vast bowl of light blue by day, an evenly curved bowl covering the floor of the cavern; by night it is jet-black, except for a dim sun and countless twinkling lesser suns—which seem less only because they are so far away, toward the top of the blue dome."

"How high," said David heavily, his heart hurting him, so filled with agony was he for his brother, "is the dome?"

"It has no height," said Frank. "It is immeasurably far away."

"Nothing," said Jan Schmidt, "is immeasurable. You are a mathematician, can figure out distances. How high is the dome?"

"I'll try to tell you," went on Frank. "I'll have to take the sun, the principal, daytime sun—incidentally it travels clear across the sky, from east to west, during the day, and hangs in space of itself—as an instrument of measuring. I can't believe how far away it was, yet I have to accept my own observations . . ."

"And they told you what?" persisted Jan Schmidt.

David had the feeling that Jan wanted to persecute Frank.

"Ninety three million miles from the floor of the cavern!" said Frank. The Elders gasped. They couldn't conceive of such a distance, he knew. He couldn't himself. Nobody could. He'd been almost afraid to come back to tell them. "About the distance light travels in between eight and nine minutes!"

They'd know that. Maybe, if he were careful, and logical, he could convince them.

"But that isn't the top of the cavern," he went on. "There are other stars, or suns—more, in fact, than can be counted

—I found out about when I absorbed the thoughts of the people, and could find out things. Some of the stars are so far away it has taken billions of years for their light to reach the floor of the cavern—and they, still, are not against the cavern's roof!"

He could see they didn't get it, and he didn't blame them. He'd better—because he was walking on thin ice, and knew it, where his own sanity came into question—start with something easier to understand.

"Their buildings," he said, "cover the floor of their cavern. They are thickly set together, like spires. But they hold up only the emptiness. They are built up, stone by stone, from the cavern floor—by human hands. They are many times taller than any building of ours, taller than the distance between our roof and our basement floor."

Still nobody said anything. Desperately, Frank Haslop went on, while David clasped his palms together and wished that he could somehow escape all this ghastliness.

"Beyond their western city," continued Frank, "is a pool of water. It is so vast that it reaches north to the edge of the limitless bowl, south to the edge, and straight into the west as far as the eye can see . . ."

"The material eye!" asked old Jan, softly. "Or the Visiote?"

"THE material eye. Something like thirty miles, I guess. I understood it kept going on, limitless as the dome above—for thousands of miles, to another dirt-rock floor. I think the floors are really great masses of matter, floating on the pool. And we are merely a speck on one of the masses, inside one of the bulges on the mass. I've seen our bulge, from the outside. It is a monster, uplifted to shut off the horizon . . ."

David lifted a trembling hand to stop Frank, who only got himself in deeper with every word.

"What happened to your expedition, its members?"

"The people outside began to notice me, point me out. They became suspicious. I don't know what they thought I was. I knew I was in danger. I started back. They started to close in on me. I went up into the air, which caused them vast consternation and surprise.

Then, great metal things darted at me, swimming in the sky. There was no escape for me from the winged things in the emptiness, nor the men on the ground. They could have followed me to the crest of their roof, but they'd have caught me long before. They were too fast, and they did not tire. I went back down, raring for the place of the breakthrough. I televised my comrades for help. I merely wanted them to open the way for me, into our reeks. They came out, instead, to fight off my pursuers. They were destroyed by loud noises and flames, and broken apart. Their blood was everywhere . . .

Frank shuddered with the memory.

"It happened so quickly I could do nothing. And I knew that if I didn't get back, set everything in its proper place enroute to Sanctuary, they might find our secret, enter Sanctuary and destroy every last one of us. So I lived, by duty's behest, when I had much preferred to die, as they did. I didn't even have time to bring back a message from one of them!"

"I've heard enough," said Jan Schmidt heavily. "It's all untrue, though you believe it yourself, Frank, because you think you saw it. Your men didn't believe, so you left them, sealed in the rocks, with no stels among them, so they couldn't say you lie!"

"I'll take you all, show you!" said Frank.

But they wouldn't listen to him. He was mad, and they knew it. The Elders decided this, unanimously, though David

was reluctant, because Frank was his brother. But he decided with them, finally, because there was no alternative, and anybody could see that Frank Haslup was mad. Even Nala Zura thought so when, in desperation, David asked the Elders if she might not be present, to express her opinion. She . . . well, it was like twisting her own heart to agree with them, but when she was told what Frank had said, the wildness of his words, she saw her duty to Sanctuary. But she crossed to Frank, held his cheeks in her palms for a moment.

"Poor, poor boy!" she murmured. There was love in her voice, too; but the very depth of its intonation showed the Elders what she knew to be true. They would have spared David this, had it been possible.

But a man who had been responsible for the slaying of many . . . no, not even David's brother could escape punishment for that. They could at least try to forget the wild lies he had brought back, but they could go no farther than that.

Frank knew what was coming, and would have dashed away. But they commanded him to turn over any stels that might remain in his possession, to keep him from going. By edict no more stels would be made in Sanctuary.

Frank spent the rest of his life in Coventry's silence, and became, at long, dreadful last, the second Haslup to leave his ashes in the dishonored Erebus of the Black Columbarium.

THE END



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Somewhat Stone got to his feet, in time to see the girl dragged into the beast's embrace.



By
**JAMES
HALL**

DICTATOR OF THE AMERICAS

THE Pleasure Garden was a riot of colorful, sensual brilliance. Rainbow-hued fountains tinkled softly; warm lights glowed on the ivory flesh of half-clad girls who lounged on the velvety turf, their slim arms caressing the men beside them. Incense and heady wine flamed through the brain of John Stone as he sprawled on silken cushions, idly watching the bacchanals. Yet deep in Stone's heart was a chill, deadly warning. He knew what lay behind this saturnalia, held at the order of Vali Nestor, Dictator of the Americas. Another night of red love to make Stone forget that he was rightful ruler of the land, that Nestor had killed Stone's father two years before and assumed

control of the government. Not for the first time the young man felt rage rising within him, hatred for the tyrant who had brought his army of Vandals to Washington in 2503 A. D.—and who now held the country in a grip of iron!

A white hand caressed his cheek, drew his head down to the ready lips of a blonde girl, her softly rounded shoulders and breasts scarcely hidden by gauzy draperies. But Stone pulled free—and paused, staring at the open clearing before him.

In the violet glow of a spotlight a woman danced—and Stone's eyes widened at sight of her. Slim as a reed, yet her alabaster body set the man's pulses pounding. She danced, languor-

study at first, and then faster, wildly swaying and whirling to the throbbing beat of unseen musicians. Laughing, she posed before Stone, flaunting the alluring beauty of her form, revealed by a translucent skirt and golden breast-plates. She darted forward as the music swelled to a crescendo, and her lips brushed Stone's ear. Her breath was an exotic perfume as she whispered,

"Come! Come with me . . ."

The girl beside Stone tried to hold him back, but he rose, and let the dancer tug him into the shadow of the trees. She led him through the garden till the revelry was a far, faint huzzah in the distance. Then she paused, and Stone drew her close—set his lips against hers, feeling the pliant warmth of her body against his own. His throat was dry, and the flaming passion of the girl's kiss was liquid fire racing through his veins.

She drew back. Glancing around quickly, she said, "Wait, John Stone! I bring a message."

"Eh?" She was a gleaming statue in the moonlight, a statue of sensuous madness, and at first Stone did not understand. Then his eyes widened. "A message? What—"

"From the Scientists. Vail Nestor has ruled the Americas for two years now, keeping you a prisoner here. But all over the country men are getting ready to march on Washington, aided by the weapons the Scientists have made. The rising will come next week, and then—if we succeed—you'll be restored to power. The people loved your father, and they know you—trust you. Nestor they hate. So—"

"Nestor's making America into a nation of slaves!" Stone growled. "But this is good news! I've tried to escape, Lord knows! But Nestor's powerful."

The girl nodded. "I know. But he didn't dare kill you, for then all America would rise and crush him. He wanted to drug you with pleasures, making you his tool, obedient to his wishes. He'd kill you now if he could get rid of your body without leaving traces—but that's impossible in these times. He could ray you to ashes, dissolve the ashes—but the Scientists would detect what had happened."

"Well?"

"Hold yourself ready. We've learned that Nestor's discovered how to break

the space-time continuum—how to break down the wall that surrounds this universe. He's found out how to open a gate into another dimension, and such a device will be a terrible weapon in his hand. So the revolt will come in a week. You must be ready." The girl glanced up as an aircraft droned overhead, its lights glowing against the stars. "I'm called Dorna. If I send you a message—"

And then, without warning, came—the inexplicable!

All light vanished.

Instantly utter darkness blanketed Stone and Dorna. The man whispered an oath, his hand going to his belt for a weapon that was not there. The starlight overhead, the distance searchlights—all had flashed out and disappeared in one jet-black curtain. Very faintly a distant humming sounded.

"Dorna!" Stone said sharply. There was no response. He made a movement toward the girl—

HE could not stir! Some amazing paralysis held him fettered. His body was numb and devoid of feeling—and a strange lassitude was creeping up and overwhelming his mind.

The humming grew louder. A cold gray radiance began to grow, and in its light Stone saw Dorna beside him, her slim, half-nude body stiff and rigid. But, aside from her, Stone could see nothing. The sky was invisible; in its place was a gray ceiling of redness.

Above him something swam into view. A platform, hanging unsupported in empty air, about which shimmering streamers of light played. Somehow it hurt Stone's eyes to look at that platform; there was a strange vibration about it that made it a thing half-real, half-solid—and transparent at times in a ghostly fashion. It floated down slowly. On it stood Nestor, Dictator of the Americas—and a girl.

Close-shaven, ruggedly handsome, wearing the unornamented gray uniform of the Vandal army, Vail Nestor smiled down at Stone. The girl—

This was Aphrodite. . . .

No earthly woman could have such beauty, Stone thought. Cool green eyes, faintly mocking, watched him intently, and curved lips twisted into a smile. Her rounded breasts pushed out the

sheer green robe she wore, a garment that clung to her thighs and lyric hips, outlining them and the tapering columns of her legs. Aphrodite, risen from the sea. . . .

Nestor pointed, turned to his companion—and the girl nodded. She lifted her hand, which held a shining metallic device. And a curious feeling began to oppress Stone—a feeling of weightlessness. His feet seemed to have difficulty in resting on the ground. A strong pull was dragging him up toward the platform.

He could not move, could not stir a muscle to break the strange fetters that bound him. He felt himself lifted, felt himself moving up with increasing speed. At his side Dorna kept pace. They were on the platform, and Nestor's low laughter was in Stone's ears.

"So we are ready, Marsalaya," he said. "It was not difficult—" His hand went out, touching studs on a low keyboard near by. A wrenching jar shook Stone. He lay full length on the platform, rigid and motionless, watching with wide eyes. Beside him was Dorna, a silent statue.

The grayness changed. A sense of frightful vertigo clutched Stone. He seemed to be falling vertically, and at the same time slipping sideways with tremendous speed. For an amazing moment he was conscious of two selves, coexistent, hanging on the borderline between two sectors—one the edge of the space-time continuum—between dimensions!

Swiftly Nestor kicked at Dorna's body. The green-robed woman cried out, tried to stop him—but too late. Dorna rolled from the platform, and Stone caught a glimpse of her face twisted with horror. Then sheer madness came.

As the girl fell from the platform, something seemed to rip her form apart, shredding it instantly into its component atoms, rending the atoms, tearing, whirling—

Nestor murmured, "She exists in two dimensions now, Stone. Her body, her mind, her ego are split and destroyed down to the least electron. For you—" The jutting jaw thrust forward—"I have other plans!"

The sense of vertigo gripped Stone again. Grayness seemed to close in upon him, blotting out his senses. . . .

He awoke slowly, vaguely conscious of

dim red light all around. The girl whom Nestor had called Marsalaya stood above him, the metallic weapon in her hand. She leveled it at him.

Painfully he tried to leap to his feet, to roll away. He could not. From the corner of his eye he saw little green patches of grass all around, and, in the distance, curiously regular tiny mounds of stone. Amusement struck through the man. Incredibly tiny creatures were moving all around him—

Human beings—fantastically small!

From the girl's weapon a ray of green light sprang out, struck his breast—flowed all over his body, bathing him in weird fire. But there was no pain. Merely a curious shrinking sensation—and again he noticed the little men, grown somehow larger. And the grass—surely it was a forest, steadily increasing in size. He saw above him, through an emerald veil, Marsalaya, a towering giant. Abruptly realized what was happening. The power of the green ray was reducing his body to infinitesimal size.

Stone lost consciousness, but not completely. Dimly he was conscious of being guided through winding corridors . . . and there came a time when he lay staring up at a black shining ceiling, realizing that he was once more in control of his faculties.

PAINFULLY he crawled to his feet. The paralysis had left him. The room in which he stood was a square of polished blackness, with a window through which dim red light crept. He went to it.

It was no earthly landscape at which he gazed! A dull, red sun, thrice the size it should have been, hung over a world of jungle gone mad. A tremendous green sweep of forest lay from horizon to horizon far below, giant trees towering hundreds of feet into the air, huge vines writhing and twisting like serpents. They seemed to move as though alive—and with a dreadful certainty Stone knew that they were living things. Plant-beings, coiling and darting up as though striving to reach him. He shuddered in the cold wind that blew across this alien world.

A low voice said something in a language that was certainly not English. Yet, amazingly, Stone understood. The words seemed to form in his brain, as though by thought-transference.

"You are awake? How do you feel?"

The girl, Marsalaya, stood nearby as he turned—still Aphrodite, with the tender body of a goddess and cryptic eyes of emerald. With a stride Stone reached her, gripped her arms, the soft flesh denting beneath his fingers. Involuntarily he felt a little thrill at the girl's nearness, at the exotic fragrance that crept out from her long auburn tresses.

He fought it down, glared at her savagely. "Where the devil are *it*? Where's Nestor?"

Marsalaya laughed at him. Again the unfamiliar syllables rippled from her red lips—and again his mind understood the meaning of the strange words. "But you do not ask that. You ask, 'Will she understand my tongue?' I read your mind, John Stone."

"Yeah! Then, if you can understand me—take me back to Washington! I'm needed there. Take me to where Nestor is!"

Green eyes mocked him. "Washington? It has never existed in this universe. Another dimension—another time-sector—why, then Washington of yours may have been dust for a million years! Or it may not have yet sprung from the soil of your planet. No—you must obey me. You cannot do otherwise."

"That so?" Stone granted. He prisoned the girl's wrist, swung her about and bent her arm up behind her back. She fought savagely, writhed free, clawed at his face with her nails. But Stone was too strong for her.

He bent the girl back easily, prisoning her hands with one of his own. "Where's Nestor?" he growled.

"Gone back to your planet! He—when he came through the dimensions, he told me certain things. In return he asked me to destroy you."

Stone looked down at that alluring face so close to his own. "Well?"

"I—I agreed—but I had no wish to slay you. Let me go! Please!" Her lips were twisted in pain.

Stone released her warily—and swung about abruptly as a shadow darkened the room. Behind him Marsalaya's voice came, soft, urgent.

"Do not move! As you value your life! He may pass. . . ."

Something flitted past the window, a black formless object that sent a shudder

down Stone's back, though he could not have said why. He waited, but the thing did not return. "What was that?" Stone asked the girl.

For a long time she did not reply. Then she went quickly to the window and peered out. "The Beast," she said without turning. "It was seeking its prey. I agreed to Nestor's proposal, Stone, because I wanted aid to slay the Beast."

"Couldn't Nestor kill it for you?" Stone asked. "What is it, a bird of some kind?"

"Nestor would not," Marsalaya said bitterly. "Nor would he leave me a weapon with which to fight it."

"And he's gone back to earth. Well, I don't see why I should fight this beast of yours. I owe you nothing. Can you take me back to my own world?"

"I cannot," she said, and lifted herself to her full height. "I command you—"

Stone smiled.

The green eyes grew hateful. "Some power have I, Stone. I can cause you great pain. . . ."

"I can cause you a little, too."

THE girl's hand flashed down, lifted with a shining weapon gripped in it. "You fool!" she whispered—and from the device a red ray lanced out. It struck Stone's body—held the man motionless in paralysis.

And agony lanced into every muscle. Frightful pain tore at his nerve ends, till sweat burst from every pore, and made him green with the grinding pain. The red ray flickered out. Stone fought to remain erect, though his legs seemed turned to water. Nausea dug into his stomach.

"Now—will you obey?"

Stone made a desperate attempt to leap at the girl, but she sprang back alertly, her weapon lifted. "Stay where you are" she cautioned.

"Go to the devil!" Stone snarled. "If you think—"

The green eyes were puzzled. Suddenly Marsalaya tossed the gun aside. "I do not wish to hurt you," she said softly. "Not even to save my people—but you must slay the Beast. You must!"

Stone shook his head doggedly.

"I will give you anything—even—" Marsalaya's face was suddenly pale. She said very softly, "Even myself."

And quickly her hands went up, slipping the emerald-green gown from her shoulders. It ripped down past the ivory globes of her breasts, the flat smoothness of her stomach, the delicate contour of her thighs, to fall in a crumpled ring about her feet.

"Even myself," the girl murmured.

Blood pulsed hotly through Stone's veins. The girl's nude body held a flame of unearthly beauty that drew him like a magnet. Involuntarily he took a step forward.

And then Marsalaya was in his arms, her breasts cushioned against his chest, her white form clinging to him. Her lips found his, and her perfumed breath was an exotic madness, clamping Stone's throat with the mad surge of passion. Aphrodite, indeed!

Goddess of love, all ecstasy and all delight! She strained against Stone, her fingers caressing his hair, and his hands slipped down, caressing a body that was like flame. His mouth found the soft hollow of her throat. . . .

She drew back. She whispered, "Will you slay the Beast—for such a reward?"

Sanity came coldly to Stone. He battled the red surge of passion that drove him toward the girl's white body; he said hoarsely, "No! Unless you return me to my planet—"

Marsalaya burst out, "I tell you—" She stopped, frowning. "Perhaps—yes! Perhaps I can do even that. Not by myself, but with Nestor's aid."

Stone laughed unsteadily. "Not much chance of that."

Swiftly the girl bent, the white cones of her breasts dancing and swaying, and recovered her robe; she slipped into it hurriedly. "Wait. He won't give his aid willingly, but we'll take it nevertheless. Nestor will return here."

"How d'you know?"

"I saw it in his mind. I read his thought, but he didn't know that. He will return to make sure you're dead. Then—I swear by the Silent Watchers—you will return to your planet!"

Stone grunted. "I must gamble, I suppose. My only chance, anyway. Well, granted that you're right—what then?"

"You must slay the Beast."

"So that's the bargain, eh?"

"Yes. It may not be a fair one, but—what can I do! I must save my people and my throne."

"What is this Beast of yours?" Stone asked.

"Listen. We know something of science in R'hân, but not much. We know the secret of invisibility, and of size-change—"

"The green ray?" Stone broke in.

She nodded. "It is that which caused the trouble. One of my subjects—a murderer, condemned to death—was used as a subject by a scientist, as in our custom. The scientist was experimenting with atomic warp. He was trying to do what Nestor did successfully—open a gate to another dimension. But he took the wrong path. He used his rays on this subject's body, attempting to transport the man into another dimension by working directly on the atoms of his body—and he failed. But a change occurred—"

HORROR grew in the girl's eyes. "The murderer's atomic structure was changed—frightfully! He is a monster, with the strength of a giant. And when he realized his power he escaped and seeks to rule R'hân. He is no longer human—we call him the Beast. He can even fly, by attaching wings to his arms—huge wings, thrice as long as his body—and manipulating them. Strength can be a horrible thing when misused."

"Now I understand," Stone said, nodding. "All but one thing. Why do you think I can kill this Beast if you can't?"

"We have few weapons. We are not a warlike race. Our arms are based on the vibration principle, and because of the Beast's atomic change, vibration has no effect on him. So he seeks to make me his mate, and to rule R'hân. But you can slay him, for men of your planet are far stronger than our men. When your body shrank, you retained all the muscular power you had on earth, compressed into a body a hundred times smaller. So you are at least as strong as the Beast, if not stronger."

"Our strength is slight," the girl said.

"But yours—" She turned, pressed her hand against the wall. A panel slid aside revealing a hollow. Marsalaya murmured soft syllables into it. With a gentle click the bottom of the niche fell away, lifted again. On it now was a glowing, pale stone fist-large, cut into a dozen facets that reflected Stone's face as he looked at the gem.

"It is the roofdike jewel," Marakaya said. "One of the hardest elements on our planet. Only the strongest hammers can crush it. Squeeze it in your hand, Stone."

He took the gem, compressed his fingers tentatively about it. It shattered like celluloid, trickled from his clenched fist in a stream of fine dust and coruscating fragments.

"So," the girl murmured. "Your strength is sufficient. Will you fight the Beast?"

Stone hesitated. "If that's the only chance I have of getting back to earth, I suppose I must—yes. But you'll keep your part of the bargain—help me fight Nester!"

She nodded. "Come."

Stone followed the girl up a winding corridor of black metal that ended in a square of blue sky overhead. They emerged on a roof-top. Advancing toward the edge, Stone saw incredibly far beneath the shining minarets and towers of a city. A few pinnacles stabbed up almost to the dizzy height where they stood. The streets beneath were almost deserted. A few foreshortened people moved about quickly, furtively.

Stone turned to see Marakaya standing alone in the center of the roof. Her head was lifted proudly, and from her red lips came a shrill, fierce crying. Summoning the Beast; Using herself as bait, to draw the monster-man to battle!

Stone hurried to her. "Can you give me a weapon?" he asked. "A sword—a club, even?"

She turned mocking green eyes to him. "The Beast is invulnerable to our weapons—they shatter on him. Many of our warriors have died proving that." The color drained swiftly from her face, leaving it strained and pale. "The Beast comes! May the Silent Watchers guard you, Stone!"

The whirl of heaving pinions sounded. As the man turned he saw a frightful and incredible form rise above the edge of the black tower's roof.

It was the Beast.

The human aspects of the thing made it more horrible than any merely animal traits would have been. The very stones of the creature's body had been insanely warped, and in the change had come sheer horror. The thing was short and squat, seemingly boneless, with a huge

cylindrical head set on humped, broad shoulders, from which spread great wings of thin metal. The monster's flesh shimmered with changing colors, and somehow a perpetual shudder of tiny movement seemed to shake the framework of the gross body. Gigantic glowing eyes watched Stone, flicked past him to the girl.

The creature rasped out an angry, triumphant cry. It grated unpleasantly on Stone's ear-drums, reinforcing his impression that this monster was utterly inhuman—utterly unnatural. It should never have existed in a sane world. It was a living blasphemy, and its snarl, as it moved forward, seemed to shrill up and up beyond the pitch of audible sound, sending a lancing pain through Stone's head. But he moved forward, conscious of a fear and repugnance he could not suppress.

BUT he was unprepared for the Beast's power. The monster charged and sent Stone crashing down on his back, helpless under a heavily oppressive weight. For a second the thing hovered over Stone—and then raced on. From Marakaya came a cry of knife-edged horror.

Somehow Stone got to his feet, in time to see the girl dragged into the Beast's embrace. She slipped away, but a taloned claw darted out, pulled her close again. The girl's gown was ripped into shreds, and long red scratches sprang out on her bare flesh as the monster fought to subdue her. Abruptly Marakaya went limp, her white body in strange contrast to the hideous gleaming hide of the Beast.

The monster's face came down, nuzzling the girl's bare throat. And with a hoarse shout Stone sprang forward, madness of crimson rage flaming within his brain at sight of that blasphemous decoration.

The Beast dropped Marakaya callously and turned to meet Stone. For a second he felt sick and giddy with the malefic hatred that blazed from the huge eyes; talon-like paws reached out; obviously the monster expected to crush this presumptuous opponent easily. The claws dug into Stone's shoulders, dragging him forward.

This would be the testing. Was the creature too strong? Would Stone's

body he smashed and broken in that frightful grip?

Stone sent a sledgehammer punch, with all his strength, at the inhuman mask so close to him. And he saw amazement leap into the staring eyes of the Beast. Flesh gave beneath the man's fist; yet the monster did not seem to be harmed. Its wings smashed and crumpled as it rocked back and forth; it released one paw, tore them free, flung them aside. It closed with Stone, roaring.

The feel of the thing's body was loathsome. It seemed to crawl and give beneath Stone's hands. A foul breath was hot in the man's nostrils as he drove vicious blows at the writhing, seemingly boneless body. The two reeled toward the roof's edge.

Smash and rip and tear, with sick horror mounting slowly within Stone. Could the thing be invulnerable? Could he even hurt it? He was asking from the Beast's mauling, blood dripping from a dozen wounds. Yet he had made no impression on the glistening, vari-colored hide.

To his ears came Marsalaya's voice, urgent, warning. "Stone—Nestor returns! Kill the beast swiftly or I cannot aid you!" Over the monster's humped shoulder he saw the girl, nude save for the tattered remnant of the gown about her hips, standing with arms outstretched. A surge of strength raced into Stone's body.

He bent low, lifted the Beast on his shoulders, felt a great talon rip into the muscles of his chest. He tore it away, staggered toward the roof's edge, reeling beneath the monster's weight. Bellowing, the Beast fought, almost writhed free.

Though Stone could not actually hurt his opponent, his strength was slightly greater—just enough to turn the tide of battle. The two, man and monster, staggered and wrestled on the roof's edge, until at last Stone flung himself flat on the black surface, his head cracking sickeningly against the stone.

The smooth blackness gave! It cracked and crumbled and powdered, and Stone felt himself slipping forward into nothingness. The Beast, across his shoulders, clawed at him, sparing. He thrust it away with desperate blows. And suddenly—

It fell. It slid over the brink and

dropped, its death cry skirling up and fading as it plummeted down. Stone almost followed it, but managed to roll aside and fling himself back in time, with the hands of Marsalaya aiding him. The girl was at his side, her eyes wide and exultant.

She cried, "Wait! Wait here, Stone!" And she reeled into the black opening that led down into the tower. Gasping, weak with reaction, Stone stood silent till Marsalaya returned a minute later. In her hand was a small, shining crystal and an instrument of silvery metal. She thrust the crystal at Stone.

"Quick—Nestor is here. Squeeze the gem—gently. But not until I tell you—"

MARSALAYA'S fingers tightened on the metal object she held. From it a green ray flicked out, bathed Stone. Through a shimmering emerald nimbus he saw the tower-top shrinking, dropping away beneath him. The city grew tiny below, only the white form of Marsalaya remaining the same as she kept pace with Stone's growth.

"You've slain the Beast," she said softly. "My gratitude will not be in words. Squeeze the jewel. It's the secret of invisibility—"

Stone tightened his grip on the gem, and instantly was in utter blackness. Faintly came the girl's voice.

"Through the jewel . . . look through it."

He obeyed, lifting it to his eyes, and saw as through a glass Marsalaya's face and green-veiled ivory body beside him. He took the gem from his eyes and was in blackness; replaced it, and saw the green jungle, the black city, already tiny and indistinct below.

"Keep silent till I give the word," the girl said. "You'll be invisible to Nestor. Keep the gem close to you, or you'll become visible again. When I tell you, jump onto the platform."

Stone dared not answer. For, swiftly shrinking as he grew, seemingly coming down from incredible largeness as it dwindled, was the dimension platform, and upon it stood Nestor, handsome face grimly alert. He leaned forward as he saw Marsalaya, and his lips tightened. Stone held his breath, waiting for Nestor to see him, but the Dictator looked only at the girl. Exultation flooded Stone;

he was invisible to his enemy!

The growth stopped. Marsalaya, Stone, Nestor, were all approximately the same height, the girl perhaps half a head shorter than the others. She said softly, "Nestor, you've come back."

The Dictator eyed her warily. "Yes is Stone dead?"

Marsalaya nodded. "The Beast killed him. Will you give me weapons now that I've done as you wished?"

Nestor looked startled. "I said nothing—oh, you read my mind, eh? The devil with you, Marsalaya! No, I'll give you no weapons—but you'll come back to earth with me. Stone's dead, where the Scientists can never prove his death, and you'll join him, after I've had my pleasure of you!"

Roaring laughter, the Dictator swept out a thick arm, gripped the girl, dragged her onto the platform. Her bare shoulders dented under the pressure of Nestor's fingers.

"You're beautiful!" the man whispered hoarsely. "When I first saw you I wanted you. But I needed your aid first. Now things are changed—" Nestor's thick lips found Marsalaya's soft ones, and the girl cried out as the Dictator bent her back.

"Stone! Help me—"

With a bound Stone sprang onto the platform. A frightful shock made him dizzy for a moment, and the gem dropped from his suddenly relaxed fingers. Nestor gasped an oath. Stone, no longer invisible, knew that his enemy saw him plainly.

The Dictator swiftly whirled, let his fingers dance over the keyboard beside him. And instantly grayness was all about them, save for a little square of humming vibration above the platform. They were plunging through the dimensions, fung into alien space by the weird power of the Dictator's machine.

Now Nestor saw that he had been too slow, that Stone was charging forward, eyes cold and deadly. The Dictator's hand flashed down to his hip; his gun came up and bellowed death in one incredibly fast movement.

A thin pencil-ray of heat charred Stone's shoulder. He smashed against Nestor, who went reeling back, clutching at nothingness. He dropped over the edge of the platform, screaming like a lost soul. And instantly his body van-

ished—torn asunder, wrenched apart like clouds in a gale, as Dorna, the spy sent by the scientists, had vanished, slain by Nestor. The same fate had overtaken the Dictator!

Vertigo consumed Stone; he reeled back, slumped at the keyboard to steady himself. Remembering how Nestor had guided the platform, he bent forward, examining the half-dozen keys that lay before him.

Four were depressed; one of the others was black, the remaining key white. Stone felt the touch of Marsalaya's hand on his arm. The girl murmured, "Can we—get back?"

"I don't know," Stone said sombrely, and, guessing, depressed the white key. Immediately he knew that he had been wrong.

The platform hesitated, turned, began to topple, sliding down sideways as though into some immeasurable abyss. The girl's body crashed against his; as Stone lost his balance he jabbed out wildly, touched the black key—

Instantly the platform became level. It sank down through fading gray clouds. The mists dissipated and vanished completely as Stone felt a jar that almost sent him to his knees.

HE was back in the Pleasure Gardens! A low moon hung over the trees, painting the lawn around them with warm brilliance. It was very silent; the fountains still tinkled in the distance, but no voices sounded, and the music was silent. Hastily Stone leaped from the platform, and caught Marsalaya as she followed him. He held her in his arms, the fragrance of her hair a remembered ecstasy that made him draw the girl's slim body close.

"Marsalaya," he whispered. "Nestor's gone. America's free again, and—" Stone hesitated. "Our scientists will figure out how the dimension platform works. They'll find a way to take you back to your planet."

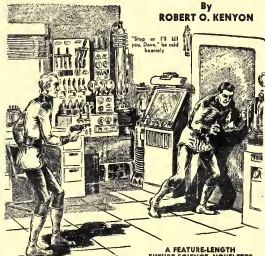
The green eyes were very tender. "Will they? But my people are safe now, since you killed the Beast. They do not need me."

"You—you mean you'll stay! On earth—here with me!" Stone's voice was incredulous.

Though Marsalaya did not speak, her lips answered him.

THE DARK HERITAGE

By
ROBERT O. KENYON



PROLOGUE

WITHOUT speaking the trife followed Sorg, the chieftain, as he marched stubbornly through the wilderness. All were frightened. The tangled, underbrush and the dark shadows of the trees looming overhead created an atmosphere of mystery, in keeping with the legends of this desolate land. Occasionally the rounded summit of a low mountain range was visible far ahead. The air was chill with early spring, touched with the remembrance of an iron-cold winter.

A woman broke from the straggling group, and came to Sorg's side. She touched the chieftain's arm furtively.

"I am afraid," she whispered. "Sorg

... let us turn back."

Sorg made no reply. His gaunt hand, gripping a wooden spear, tightened. His broad, fur-clad shoulders were thrown back almost imperceptibly, as though to meet a challenge.

"You are strong," the woman said. "Strongest in the world, I think. But... the Destroyer dwells here, Sorg!"

Jal the shaman fell into step beside her—a shrivelled old man, bedecked with feathers and paint. His wise gaze was strangely comforting to the woman. He said, "In our own place we starve. The winter has killed all the game."

"And I will not grub for roots like a wile," Sorg said harshly. He fingered

Scott Holden became the Destroyer, using his vast scientific skill and power to destroy all metal—thrusting mankind back to elements to save it from knowledge that would mean annihilation!

his stiff red beard, staring around into the dim corridors of the forest. "There is game here. If the Destroyer is so powerful—why has he not killed the deer?"

The woman caught her breath in a sob. "He hates only man—you know that. We shall all die."

"He is a fable," Sorg said in a voice that did not carry conviction. "An old woman's tale."

Jal's wrinkled face was turned to the chief. "No fable, Sorg! Remember—without me beside you, the tribe would not have come to this evil land. We must walk softly. The Hunged has cursed this place where the Betrayer dwelt."

Sorg was thoughtful. Since childhood he had worshipped the Sun, and with the rest of the tribe he had spat upon the huge black globe of stone that rested in the temple-cave—symbol of the Betrayer. Never yet, to his knowledge, had anyone ventured into the secret wilderness which, according to legend, was the home of the Destroyer. Yet now, shading his eyes with a calloused palm, he could see little to frighten him.

AGES ago this had once been the suburb of a great metropolis, though Sorg did not know it. The slow tide of time had blanketed it with vegetable life. Wood had long since rotted to dust, but occasionally a strangely shaped stone poked up through the underbrush. More than once before Sorg had discovered the ruins of cities, but he did not care to remember the desolate wreckage he had seen. He had felt emotions he could not analyze, and Sorg was a realist. He did not like things he could not understand.

Behind him the tribe struggled, a wretched group of half-naked savages. Would they stay him when he ordered camp made here? Game was plentiful, and they were hungry. Though the great snows were over, it would be many moons before food could be had easily. But this was the land of the Betrayer . . . a little gust of rage touched Sorg; he shook his fist at the gray sky in a gesture of foolish defiance. The woman moaned, shuddering in the cold wind that blew between the trees.

Abruptly Jal thrust up a warning hand. He pointed. The ground dipped from their feet into a little valley, thickly forested. In its cup was a clearing, and the ruins of a building. A building bet-

ter preserved than any Sorg had seen before. Above it a vague opalescence shimmered in the air, intangible, inexplicable.

Whispers went up from the tribe. A movement of panic shook them. Even Sorg hesitated, staring down at the ruin.

Jal touched his arm and said softly, "You must go down there."

"What?"

With a movement of his eyes Jal indicated the tribe. It would not do for their chieftain to show fear now. They would flee back to the wilderness that was their home, where they would starve.

Realizing this, Sorg barked a harsh word of command and commenced to descend the slope. Presently he realized that Jal was following him. He felt oddly relieved.

They pushed through undergrowth till the clearing was before them. All around the hill-slopes mounted, Sorg could see a tiny knot of figures high above him. They were watching.

He walked softly toward the ruin. The flickering rainbow light in the air was like a dome, enclosing part of the clearing. He halted, hesitating.

He heard the breathing of Jal behind him. And he was conscious of the eyes of the tribe . . . with an involuntary shudder he put out a hand, touching the translucent, shimmering barrier.

There was some resistance, but no more than water would give. Sorg made up his mind and stepped forward, breaking easily through the strange wall. And he was conscious that Jal had followed him.

Here, within the wall, much had resisted the wearing grind of the centuries. Blocks of stone were sharply-edged instead of rounded. There were flakes of some gleaming substance on the ground—something Sorg had never seen before. He felt Jal's gaze on him, and looked up. The shaman pointed.

Between walls of stone, riven and shattered, a room was visible. Unknown objects were half buried in dust that carpeted the stone floor in uneven heaps. In the very center of that roofless chamber was a human skeleton, dust-heaped; amidst the bare whiteness of the bones something black shone.

Sorg whispered, "A man—" He could not finish. He knew what Jal would reply.

And the shaman murmured, "No man,

Sorg. The Betrayer. See!"

He moved forward to the threshold of the room, and pointed. "See what he holds! He crushed man in his grip—long ago. And things haven't changed, still man is his victim."

Skeleton hands touched the black thing: a stone statuette of a nude male figure, feet on a black globe, face upturned, arms uplifted, striving. It lay amidst the bones, pitted a little with age, and filmed with a gray dust. And Sorg knew that he beheld the Betrayer, the dreadful Destroyer who had ruined the world ages ago. The old legends thronged into his mind. "He lifted Man up only to hurl him down. The Sun-god saved us, but even yet the Betrayer has power over Man. . . ."

Sorg was breathing harshly. He said, "Jal, if I—"

The shaman nodded. He pointed to where the tribe waited. "It is in your power to free the world from the Betrayer—or his legend," he added in a whisper, for Jal was more intelligent than his fellows. He watched now while Sorg slowly advanced to the side of the skeleton and lifted the black statuette with thick fingers that trembled as he held it.

No doom fell. The Destroyer did not resent this blasphemy. And suddenly Sorg knew a new sense of power, a realization of his own achievement that sent him, heedless of Jal, racing back up the slopes, holding the image high, shouting words that would strike fetters of fear from the tribe. . . .

And on the threshold of that ruined room, Jal the shaman stood, peering down with age-dimmed eyes at the pitiful remnant of a living, breathing being. Vaguely in his mind incomprehensible thoughts stirred—a question, and a doubt, and above all a tremendous wonder and a wish to know, to look into the forgotten past when Man had been a giant instead of a brutal savage that he was now.

"We shall never know," he whispered, and turned away to follow Sorg. Yet something seemed to reach out from the skeleton on the floor, a queer affinity, and a strange understanding. Because, uncounted centuries ago to human comprehension, but a brief moment in the galactic drift, the Betrayer had been a man like Jal. . . .

I

SCOTT HOLDEN was not an impressive figure as he crouched over his desk, laboriously working out an equation. His face was thin and pale and wrinkled, though Holden was not yet fifty. Yet he was the most powerful man in this world of 1985.

He nodded at last, grunted with satisfaction, and pressed a button. While he waited he extracted a worn briar pipe from a pocket of his stained smock, and filled it carefully. Clouds of blue, foul-smelling smoke wreathed him when David Glynn entered.

Holden let his mild blue eyes wander over Glynn. An intelligent man, ears set well forward on the head, forehead high, lips firm—though Holden could never bring himself to admire or even understand the cynicism that sometimes twisted Glynn's lips into a wry sneer. Glynn was to be Holden's successor as ruler of the world.

This rule had not been sought by Holden, but thrust upon him by virtue of his accomplishments. His power lay across Earth like a Titan shadow—a shielding shadow. His experiments with the atom had enabled man to create a Utopia. And the secrets he still held enabled him to put down the wars that occasionally threatened to disrupt civilization. If Holden had not kept the greatest power for himself alone, the world would have long since perished in a holocaust of battle, with new and frightful weapons of atomic warfare. Luckily, Holden was wise, and therefore maintained his peaceful rule unhindered, with the full consent of his subjects.

Glynn said briefly, "Have you finished?"

Holden nodded. He arose and wandered to a pedestal where stood a black stone statuette—a figure of a man, feet bound to the earth, face and arms and eyes striving upward. He lifted the image gently.

"Yes, Dave," he said. "I've finished. The last details are worked out. When I throw that switch—" He pointed—"I will be able to move in time."

"When will you—"

"Why not now? But first there are some things I must tell you. This experiment—well, it's dangerous. I may not

succeed. If I die, you will take over the rule of earth."

Glynn's eyes did not change.

"I know you," Holden went on. "Therefore I trust you. I could wish that you had more heart and less brain, but—"

Glynn said sharply, "Why must you be the guinea pig? Let someone else. Let me!"

Suddenly Holden's eyes were dreaming. He glanced at the stone image he held. "No, Dave. This is my reward. I've worked for years to help mankind. I've given him new powers, new frontiers of science. I've helped him upward a little from the brute. My reward is to see the end."

Glynn's lip curled.

"What do those swine care what you've done?"

"I didn't work for a reward, Dave. You know that. I worked for man—courageous little pygmy that can face all space and time!" He laughed a little self-consciously. "I sound maudlin, eh? Well—you worship science. I worship mankind—and that's why I'm being my own guinea pig. I want to see the pinnacle of human evolution."

He put down the image. There was a glass of water on the desk, and he filled it from a carafe. Sipping slowly, Holden said, "If I don't return—"

"You're a fool," Glynn snapped.

HOLDEN did not take offense. He ruffled a few of the papers on the desk. "The secret's here. If I fail, experiment again. Eventually we'll be able to control the time-extension."

Glynn was suddenly the scientist, cold, alert, attentive. He tapped a pencil against his hand as Holden continued, his keen brain searching for possible errors in the other's theory.

"Atomic structure is the secret, Dave. Time is a dimension that interpenetrates the three spatial dimensions we know. We're like pebbles in a stream-bed, half embedded in the sand. The stream itself, flowing all around us, is time." He paused, smiling wryly. "Difficult to explain. However—we move with the stream, but slowly. All earth moves in the time-current, impelled by the stream's drag, held back by the sandy bed—our atomic structure. Now listen: if the pebble I've used as an example

could be thrust up into the current, freed from its bed of sand, what would happen?"

"I see," Glynn said.

"Yes. The stone would move with the current more swiftly than when the friction of the sand impeded it. If the pebble were made buoyant, it would go even faster. To make a man move with the current of time—to free him from the friction of his atomic structure—I change that structure."

"You've done that before."

"I've experimented, yes. Unsuccessfully till now. This experiment involves the slowing down of the electronic orbits, automatically decreasing the time-rate. Actually, the heavier elements have a slower time-rate than the lighter ones. They are more permanent. Do you know the reason? They have a greater extension into the time current."

Glynn nodded slowly. "Rutherford and Chadwick showed the way. Their experiments—"

"But they didn't know—they couldn't." A flush of pride showed briefly on Holden's gaunt face. He went on: "Electricity and light, of course, are the important factors. My papers will show you the details. Slowing down the electronic movement automatically extends the object into the time dimension. To return to our example, the pebble is rendered buoyant, lifted off the bed of the stream, and permitted to flow with the current. Because it moves with the current, there is no friction—and no time. It is this friction with the time-stream that causes us to grow old."

"But I'll move with the current, through the ages until an automatic switch releases energies that will reactivate my electronic structure. And I can return, Dave—it won't be a one-way trip. I'll still be bound to this time-sector, as though by an elastic band. I can retrace my way. The papers will explain it all." Holden turned away to open a door. He glanced back from the threshold, his eyes lingering on the black statue.

"Come on, Dave. Everything's ready."

The two went into the adjoining room. It was a laboratory, neat and spotless. In one corner of the room a flat gray disc, seven feet in diameter, topped a low platform. Wires led from its base through hollow pipes into the walls,

"Not very impressive, is it?" Holden said. "There's a lot of power there, though. Wait over there, Dave. If I'm successful, I won't be gone a second—no matter how long I stay in the future. Wait a minute!" He hurried into the adjoining room and came back stuffing a tobacco pouch into his pocket. He climbed on the platform. A lever protruded from its base.

Glynn said, "Scott!"

"Eh?"

"I—nothing. It's queer, that's all."

Holden nodded understandingly. He lifted his hand in a mute gesture of farewell and swung over the lever. Instantly a black sphere seemed to engulf platform and occupant. It sprang out of empty air, a globe of nothingness—of alien matter—

And within it stood Scott Holden, a motionless statue, utterly inert in every atom and electron — borne down the limitless cone on the sweep of times current . . .

II

UNDER his hand the lever stirred and moved; it seemed the fraction of a second since he had swung it. The black globe had vanished. Holden did not know it had ever existed. A moment ago, he felt, he had been in a familiar world. Now all was changed.

He stood on the platform, and around him was a great sweep of vastness — a room, hundreds of feet broad, perfectly circular, and towering up to a high, lumbent dome of glowing brilliance. The droning vibration of some sound was just dying in the air. Holden hesitated, wondering, and his hand went to the automatic in his pocket. Glynn had insisted upon his taking the weapon.

But the room was quite empty. There was nothing here.

Carefully Holden clambered from the platform. He hurried across the floor, feeling curiously insignificant in that vast chamber. The wall was bare, and made of a grayish metal that felt blood-warm to the hand.

The silence blanketed Holden. He felt an unreasoning surge of fear, and shouted, "Hello!" Echoes hoarse.

"If I could get out of here—!" he thought—and stepped back involuntarily. The wall before which he stood was dissolving, a great square of it, melting into nothingness. Before him, below him, was a city.

A city built like a ziggurat—a ledged pyramid, all of gray metal, dropping down beneath him to the pale yellow of jungle. Even at that tremendous distance Holden realized the enormous size of that alien forest. A glance upward, at a red sun that gave little warmth, told him the reason. Decreased solar radiation meant a corresponding increase in the leaf-surface of vegetation.

Movement shook the far jungle, though there was no wind. It seemed alive. Its pale stretches moved . . . moved . . .

But Holden was never to solve the forest's mystery. Glancing at the abyss at his feet, he knew that he could not leave the room thus; and simultaneously with the realization he felt himself lifted into the air as though by unseen hands. Weightless, he hung there, without discomfort, but with a momentary horrible fear of falling. He fought for calm.

Gravitation-control—man had not yet mastered it in his day. But in times to come . . . He saw the walls glide past, and realized he was moving, though when he closed his eyes experimentally the sense of motion vanished. A wall melted into haze as he drifted toward it, and he glided through.

He was suspended near the ceiling of a gigantic chamber. Though the floor was far below him, yet the towering metal of certain strange edifices was almost beneath his feet. He saw that they were machines, immense beyond imagination, built for some purpose he could not understand. Machines not of metal alone, but of light and movement and sheer power, he thought, staring down in wonder.

He strained his eyes for glimpses of a human figure. Fear touched him; the apprehension of finding this incomprehensible city deserted. Again he shouted, not knowing what words his lips formed.

The unseen power that held him unsupported in empty air, as though at a signal, lifted him. He drove up through a gray ceiling that vanished as he touched it. And Holden saw above him—a light.

He was conscious of nothing else; it seemed to grow and swell till it dwarfed all else. Yet Holden could not have said

its color. It seemed rainbow-hued, and yet pale as moonlight; flaming with white fury, and yet, paradoxically, a thing of black light that loomed gigantic in a universe of brightness. Holden had a queer, impossible idea that he was not seeing the light with his eyes, but, rather, with his brain. He felt an impulse to laugh shakily, and fought down incipient hysteria.

He was drawn up within the light.

THERE are no words to describe a blind man's emotions when he first sees. There were no words for Holden's emotions now. His mental vision was broadened as though veils had been drawn up suddenly; new vistas, undreamed-of images, rose up before him, and he knew unimaginable things. Knowledge seemed to be pouring into his brain. Knowledge—and understanding of this incredible city. He knew what the light was. He knew it was alive.

Yet with no life akin to ours. It had been created, the knowledge came to him, with one purpose: a storeroom for the secrets of man's brain. It was a library, and more than a library. It held all wisdom that man had gained, incorporated in its essence when it had been created. And that wisdom it could impart to any man—educating him in an hour with the whole arena of man's past and present.

Realizing this, some measure of reassurance came to Holden. He relaxed, allowing the flood of thought to pour into his brain, slowly coming to understand . . .

The light told him of his own world, and of himself. He had lived unthinkable ages ago. Yet in those long-past days were hidden the seeds of the future, the germs from which this colossal civilization had sprung.

The first keystones of science's edifice had been laid even then. Slowly, painfully, through the years and centuries and some scientists had added to their store of knowledge, ever expanding their frontiers, ever pushing outward into the unknown.

But with these new things that came into the world there mingled very old ones, emotions and passions older than mankind. Passion, greed, hatred, lust—all of these kept pace with the advance of science. Wars desolated Earth again and again. Hoodless, the scientists

worked on—delving into the mysteries that always lay beyond each new discovery.

And Holden had a terrifying mental picture of minds that were crippled and warped by beast passions, transmitted in the germ plasma, undying in its malignant effects—minds ridden by this fearful heritage plunging on into the secrets of space and time.

The cities of Man towered into the stratosphere, extended far underground. Space travel became an accomplished fact. Adventurers drove out to Mars and Venus, and later to the moons of the giant planets—and then beyond Pluto, out into the great gulfs beyond the Solar System. And travel was not limited to three dimensions alone. The scientists found ways of reaching worlds that commingled with ours, on different planes of vibration.

And to Mars and Venus, to Callisto and Ganymede and Io, to the frigid wastes of Pluto man brought fear and hatred. The heritage of the beast ruled. The life-forms of other planets were murdered or enslaved. Other dimensions submitted to the rule of the Earth.

Power, power, power—always science gave power to man, and always he abused it. But the subtle weakness that the beast heritage brought to man's mind went unnoticed, passed from generation to generation in the germ plasma and chromosomes.

Man's vision swept outward—outward—

New secrets unfolded. Greater and greater mysteries bowed to his rule—cosmic arenas—

Until man went too far.

The thoughts pouring into Holden's brain raced on . . .

III

AS the black robe sprang into existence in Holden's laboratory, David Glynn started forward. Two steps he took—and the sphere vanished. On the platform was Scott Holden—and he was old.

His shoulders were slumped and drooping, and on his face was stamped the weary tragedy of what he had seen. Glynn felt his stomach move sickeningly

as he stared into Holden's eyes. They were the eyes of a dying man.

The pale lips moved.

"You're right, you know—" Holden said, and swayed and toppled forward into Glynn's arms.

But an hour later he was seated lifelessly at his desk, facing Glynn as he talked. He explained what had happened, while the younger man watched, his dark face immobile. Once he broke into the story.

"I don't see that, Scott. Man went too far! You mean he met some enemy—"

"He met himself," Holden said dully. "Oh, I was a fool; I know that now. It was pleasant to think of man as a courageous little mite bravely going forward into the unknown, facing the mysteries of all time and space. But what do we know of the tremendous secrets—out there? In the cosmic vastnesses—things too big for us, Dave. What are we, anyway? Fungi, lichen, parasites, growing like fleas on a ball of mud and water. If the flea had a brain comparable to ours, he'd think himself the pinnacle of evolution's pyramid. Yet he could be squashed by your little finger."

He gulped the rest of a tumbler of brandy. "We're only on the outskirts now. Just touching the fringes of the universe's secrets. When we get further in—don't you see what happened?" he said shrilly, smashing the glass down on the desk. "The race learned too swiftly! I don't know how far I went in time. A million years—a hundred million—that doesn't matter. Man won't be able to understand or face the greatest mysteries of space and time till his brain has evolved to a certain point. Science went too fast. Man hadn't evolved sufficiently to understand or make use of those incredible secrets when scientists discovered them. It takes tremendous moral and mental power—a very great will—to face the last secrets of the universe. And those secrets were uncovered before man's brain had evolved enough to bear them.

"I saw what happened then. Many died. There were other cities like the one I was in, scattered through the Solar System and beyond, and in other space-time continua. This one had been built chiefly to house my time-sphere. You see, after I created the globe it would natu-

rally remain a 'dead spot' in the three-dimensional world through the ages, until the time, far in the future, when the switch was reversed. It couldn't be destroyed, for it was static matter, created by power within the globe it formed. At any rate, the geologic shifts changed the Earth's surface, so that sometimes the sphere was underground, and sometimes far up in the air. Ages, Dave—I wish I knew how many. Such changes don't take place in a century or two.

"Well, man went too far. His brain had been given power too soon. There are secrets of thought and being that will be the last to be discovered, and they are too tremendous for any but a perfect mind to face. These last men could not face them. They tried to retrace their steps, to establish a more mundane life. It was too late. They had no interest in anything but the pursuit of knowledge—and the only knowledge left they weren't able to face. They were misfits, cursed with brains that learned power too soon. The heritage of the beast from which they evolved haunted them irretrievably in the mire. They—they found a way out."

GLYNN leaned forward, frowning. The expression on Holden's face was ghastly.

"I got out of the light—that brain-thing, whatever it was—before it could tell me too much. Those last secrets are still unknown to me. The city is run by something like a robot system. There are artificially created intelligences at various points within it that automatically satisfy the mental desires of human beings. That's why the wall opened when I wanted to get out, and all the rest. The intelligences were trying to obey the confused thoughts I gave them.

"Once I knew that, I wanted to be returned to the room where I'd left the machine. I felt sick and nauseated, Dave. Twice I started to get on the platform to return, and twice I turned back. You've guessed why. I wanted to know what was the way out mankind discovered."

Holden gulped more brandy. "I found out. I wanted to be taken to the place where the other humans were. That unseen force lifted me, sent me plummeting down through metallic floors that vanished at my touch, down

into the heart of the pyramid. At last I saw them, in a great room far underground. About a hundred, more or less. Beautifully formed men. Glauia Mighty heads—their craniums were magnificent."

Holden laughed harshly. "They were mad, you know. Quibic hopelessly insane. Pinnacle of man's evolution. Idiots. They'd destroyed the thing that had destroyed them—their brains."

He picked up the brandy bottle; it was empty. Staring at it, his voice a little thick with the liquor, he said: "They were quite happy, too. In non-realization of themselves. Automatically fed and cared for by the robot intelligences." He laughed mirthlessly. "It's funny, Dave. Why don't you enjoy the joke? Man and science fighting. You're the champion of science—and you're going to win."

He swung about, eyeing the black statue on the pedestal. Suddenly he started a wordless oath, sprang up and took a few steps toward the image. But he stumbled and came crashing down in a huddled unconscious heap. . . .

For ten days Holden was a grim, dispirited shadow. He moved purposelessly about the laboratories, drinking incessantly. Worried, Glynn secretly watered the liquor, but presently Holden returned to his desk, neglecting alcohol for black coffee. He worked on his calculations for days, vainly trying to find a solution. It seemed useless. Time was unchangeable.

Then, at last, Glynn gave him the clue he had been seeking. "Scott," he said, "there's a discrepancy somewhere. According to your story, the globe of static matter will exist—did exist—from the present day to the time you reached in the future. That right?"

Dawning realization shone in Holden's eyes. He said, "You mean—"

"Well, it isn't there now. It vanished when you returned."

"You're right. Obvious! I should have known—it means the future can be changed, Scott."

"How?"

"I changed it when I came back to 1985. Time isn't a stream—it's a network, a labyrinth of branches. Each moment we're at a fork. If I throw a switch now, Earth's destiny is borne along one branch of the stream. If I don't, it takes

another path. Time isn't unchangeable."

Holden whirled and returned to his desk. Only once he glanced up to say triumphantly, "I learned a great deal in the future. Knowledge I can use now. In vibration—" He laughed shortly and again bent over his pages of calculations.

GLYNN learned the plan in sketches as he worked with microscope and electric apparatus under Holden's direction. The old man was enraptured by a fire that would not let him cease; he worked both day and night, with the aid of caffeine tablets and other stimulants.

"You see," he told Glynn once, "the factors that went to make up the ultimate collapse of mankind are still in existence. There's too much science. Man must relapse into the barbarism from which he emerged too soon. Eventually he'll recover the lost sciences, but not until his brain has grown and evolved a good deal. This vibration—"

Glynn's face was queerly cold. "What will it do to metals, Scott?"

"Destroy them. I learned that, at least, in the future. Sympathetic vibration applied to the atomic structure—"

"But it'll wreck civilization!"

"Only so that a better one may be built up later."

"What of the human organism?"

Glynn asked quickly. "Certain metallic elements are necessary—"

"The destruction of metals will take a long time—perhaps several hundred years. In that time man can adapt himself to the slowly vanishing supply of metal. I've taken that into consideration."

All metals would be destroyed. The thought hammered at Glynn's mind as he moved about the laboratory, examining slides through the microscopes, testing currents and rheostats, adjusting wires. Curiously enough, the cold cynic became man's champion. He argued with Holden, pleaded with him, accused him. But he accomplished nothing.

One night Holden, working in the laboratory, straightened at a furtive sound from the next room, Glynn's workshop. He laid down his instruments and hesitated. Then, as a thought came to him, he hurried into his own office and so-

cured the gun that lay on his desk. He had realized that the sound he had heard was a voice—and not Glynn's.

But when he entered the younger man's room, the gun hidden in his pocket, Glynn was typing busily. He glanced up, lifting inquiring eyebrows.

"Who was that in here?" Holden asked.

Glynn's lips parted slightly. "There was nobody—"

"What? The police? The government? You've told them."

"Well, what if I have?" Glynn stood up, scowling blackly. "I gave you your chance. I tried to stop you, but I couldn't. Now they'll stop you."

Holden glanced at the door, and saw that it was locked. Glynn, seeing the direction of his look, nodded. "They can break it down. Scott, give it up! I'll tell them I lied—"

"No."

"You plan to wreck the world?"

"Not permanently," Holden said with an odd flash of humor. Somehow he felt calm and steady, with nerves of ice, though he knew he faced the greatest crisis of his life. He wondered briefly at himself, at the queer and inexplicable engine that was the human brain. "Not permanently. Man will recover the lost sciences. He'll get back metal when he masters atomic transmutation. And he'll find substitutes."

The door vibrated to a low, urgent knock. Glynn said with fierce desperation, "Scott, give it up! I tell you—"

"No."

Glynn drew a deep, unsteady breath. Then he turned to the door. Holden said sharply:

"Don't open it!"

Glynn stopped, but did not glance back. He took another step forward.

Holden took the gun out of his pocket. "Stop or I'll kill you, Dave," he said. Glynn looked over his shoulder, gave a low, hoarse shout, and rushed toward the door. His hand was on the lock when Holden fired.

THERE was no time to aim. So the bullet killed Glynn instead of merely wounding him. Glynn dropped to lie motionless on the floor, and abruptly a volley of knocks thundered out. Holden put the gun in his pocket and raced back into his laboratory, locking the door behind

him. He worked furiously for perhaps five minutes, and then the attackers broke down the outer door. But another panel still barred their entrance—a panel of tough steel.

This gave Holden time enough to complete his task. He had learned many things in the world of the future, and now he hastily made a number of adjustments on his time-platform. The device, he knew, could be adapted to influence atomic structure in various ways. Presently he had finished, though the door was warping beneath the noisy attack. Bullets had dented it.

Holden moved the lever. A globe of shimmering, opalescent light sprang out all around him—and swiftly it darkened. It became black as the time-sphere had been. But the attributes of this globe were somewhat different. It was a barrier—a hollow shell of atomic energy that could not be penetrated by anything man had ever created.

It expanded slowly, passing through walls and ceiling without effort. But the men beyond the door hesitated at sight of the strange wall of darkness that was walling out before them, and drew back. One man waited too long, and as the atomic shell passed through his body he screamed in agony and died, to vanish beneath the blackness, his molecular structure disrupted. The others fled.

The globe was quiescent at last, and the men tried their weapons on it. But it seemed to have solidified now, and bullets merely fell flattened to the ground. Later, machine-guns and airplane torpedoes were tried, without success. For a while the entire forces of civilization were bent upon penetrating the atomic shell and reaching Scott Holden. For Glynn had given Holden's secret to the world, and had explained Holden's attempt to destroy all metals. In self-protection mankind tried to destroy Holden and his laboratory.

But the scientist, unmoved, continued his work within the sphere. In a day he had finished the machine, and without delay moved the switch that would send around the Earth the destructive radiations. And, sighing a little, he straightened and looked around for the first time in hours.

He was extremely thirsty. But the canteen was empty, and the faucet gave

only a trickle of muddy liquid, having apparently been cut off at the main. Holden drank some sherry instead.

He stood for a while looking at the door beyond which Glyn's body lay, but he did not open it. Shrugging, he went to a cupboard and began to measure out fine crystals into a large glass container. Since Glyn's death Holden had thought himself beyond all emotion, working only on his brain. And now his intellect told him oddly that only slow starvation awaited him within the atomic shell. He did not dare remove it, for he guessed that even now attackers were trying to shatter the globe with every weapon they had.

No, the shell must remain, guarding the machine that sent out radiations that would gradually destroy all metals. In a hundred years metals would start to weaken and fail. Then the cities would go. In two hundred years only stone or wooden structures would exist; man would have adapted himself to a body without metallic elements; and he would be slipping backward into barbarism. For all the instruments of science would go, from the great telescopes to the smallest micrometers.

HOLDEN poured a liquid into the container. As it touched the crystals, gas was generated. A painless death—and quick.

Turning, his eyes fell on the black stone statuette. He quickly took it from the pedestal and dropped into a chair, cradling the image in his arms. It seemed oddly heavy . . . the effect of the gas, no doubt.

The machines would be gone in a few hundred years, when the metals went. But the shell would remain on, Holden knew, gradually growing weaker and more tenuous as its energy was dissipated into the air. But not for many ages would man be able to break the barrier.

The gas hissed. Death . . . it was just, after all. He had killed Glyn. Holden's eyes stung, a strong bond of affection had existed between the two men, and now his harshly repressed emotions came flooding back to him.

But they could not hurt him now . . . nothing could hurt him any more, not even the hatred and fear that future generations would give him. . . .

Imperceptibly the sleep of the Betrayer merged into death.

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"My friends," declared the leader, "I cannot guarantee the success of this experiment."



THROUGH THE TIME-RADIO

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

ABOVE the snow-matted green of the pines that crowded the tip of Manhattan Island, the winter sun arose in smokeless splendor. From somewhere amid the wilderness, one might have heard the cry of a wolf, the grunting of a bear, the scurrying of small wood-creatures through the underbrush; but, far across the densely forested heights, and upon the tree-grown slopes beyond the unnavigated rivers and bay, one would have seen only the unbroken waste, with not a sign that man had ever in-

habited those parts. The Hudson and the Harlem, in that remote winter of the forty-first century, were unpolluted streams beneath whose leaf-floes great multitudes of fishes sported and swam, not a bridge crossed their smooth-flowing expanses, and not a brick or rod of steel or sign of concrete or mortar marred their thickly vegetated banks.

About an hour or two after sunrise, the quietude was disturbed by an unusual event. The sea-gulls showed it by the excitement with which they swung through

The horrible destruction of our barbaric 20th century civilization is observed on jungle-like Manhattan Island through the strange post-penetrating machine built by Eskimos in the 41st century!

the air and screamed; two great black eagles manifested their interest by circling at an immense height above the Hudson's wide glistening stretch. From far up the river, there appeared an object such as none of the wilderness dwellers had ever beheld before. Perhaps seventy-five feet from stern to stern, with the high lifted prow of a Viking long-boat and a covering of canvas-like white, it was the first vessel to break these waters in many a dim century. Occupying its single deck, one might have distinguished a company of far-clad men—not more than twelve or fifteen in all — and, upon close approach, one would have noticed that they all had the fat, rounded faces, the sparkling oblique eyes, the rather low foreheads, the flat noses and black hair characteristic of the Eskimos.

Yet that they were not children of a primitive civilization was shown by several facts: that their boat, propelled by some mechanical force, moved through the water at an effective speed of ten or twelve miles an hour; that they were possessed of various steel dishes, vials and other apparatus, which could only be regarded as scientific instruments; and that several of them passed their time glancing over documents printed in black with the characters of some civilized language.

WITHIN a mile of the spot where the Hudson widened into the deserted bay, the strangers paused, hesitated, and, after a moment, turned their vessel toward the eastern shore, and ran it upon a snowbank, in a manner to indicate that it possessed amphibious powers. Then one by one and in silence they alighted, loosened their furs (for the temperature, on that clear January day, was well above zero), and looked about them with eyes glistening with expectation.

But not a word did any of them say until their leader—a ruddy-cheeked six-footer, who answered to the name of Angler—had inspected their surroundings with an air of satisfaction, and then made himself heard in a guttural tongue:

"My friends, this is the place. For many days we have traveled over plain and lake and river from our homes in the good North, hoping to find the ruins of the fabled capital of antiquity. And now here, in this southern wilderness, we come to the end of our journey. You know how important our mission is. You

know how we, with our Arctic civilization which has been developing for more than two thousand years, have long believed ourselves the sole inhabitants of the globe; have long held the regions south of Labrador too warm to support human life.

"But you also know that rumors have persisted of a great civilization which thrived in the south-land before our fathers rose to power. Tradition tells us that it climbed to prodigies of greatness; that its towers touched the skies, and its engines harnessed the strength of the waters and the minerals of the earth; and that, by its very might, it destroyed itself. But our people, not being credulous, have always laughed at such tales. Only recently have we been able to decipher the inscriptions on ancient monuments, which speak of the city that stood on a river-bank near the ocean, exactly at our present location. And so we, the members of a scientific exploring expedition, must make every effort to find the relics of the ancient civilization."

Having made this pronouncement, Angler gave a few brief orders; and his followers reached into their stranded boat and drew forth a variety of instruments, some of them looking not unlike compasses, barometers and thermometers, and others with the appearance of spades, harrows and other digging utensils.

Strange and various were the comments of the men as they worked. "For my part, I don't think we're going to find anything," remarked plump-checked Bogluk, the youngest of the party, while pointing across the river to the precipitous tree-covered palisades. "How could any human beings exist in such a dreadful wilderness?"

"Oh, don't be too certain," returned sober-looking Blumster, the navigator of the boat. "They say these ancient savages were hardy, and could endure anything."

"How they ever got food enough way down here, is more than I can see," commented a third member of the group. "We haven't seen so much as a camp-fire or igloo for the last thousand miles."

Meanwhile the majority, jabbering and chattering in a friendly manner, made ready to follow their leader on a tour inland. But few realized what an ordeal awaited them. To make a path through that unbroken underbrush proved at

times almost impossible; they had to hack with axes at the obstructing shrubs and saplings, while frightened grouse and rabbits scurried out of their way. More than an hour was consumed in the first half-mile, then, panting and sweating despite the chill of the January air, they came to a halt, already looking fatigued and discouraged.

"I don't see where this will get us," complained Bo-glub, as, with homesick visions of the familiar ice-sheets of Greenland, he sat down to rest among the thickets in the heart of Manhattan Island. "By all the souls in the north seas! I don't know why any human being ever wanted to live here!"

"Remember, not every race can expect to reach our own high plane of civilization!" reproved chief Ar-glar. And it was just at this moment that his keen slanting black eyes brightened with a discovery.

"Sacred tasks of the walrus, what's that!" he suddenly exclaimed, pointing to a tall oval mound, which, covered with snowy trees and bushes, stood out like a white lump on the head of the island. "That doesn't look to me like a natural formation. Suppose we begin digging there."

WITHOUT a word, the men set to work with their picks and harrows. . . . And several hours later, after the toil of almost unremitting excavation, they had begun to unearth that which they had come so far to find.

Their first trophy, discovered at a depth of six feet, was such as to make them cry out in jubilation. Though intrinsically of no value, this flat little shining thing, fractured by the stroke of the pickaxe, was to them a treasure of inestimable worth. Carefully they folded it away, to be taken back home for the inspection of their scientists and the enrichment of their museums. Little could they guess that this translucent greenish material was but a piece of broken window glass!

Other relics, in the course of the succeeding days, were procured in increasing abundance. They gathered about with shouts of enthusiasm at the discovery of a dentured watch-case of gold (a metal previously unknown to them); they were convulsed with delight by some burst and crumbling bricks, and a frag-

ment of badly decorated bone; they went into ecstasies of joy over a flattened platinum ear-ring and some splinters of shattered crockery. Here were culminating proofs that Manhattan Island had actually been inhabited!

But despite such superb finds, not all the members of the party were satisfied. "I tell you," Bo-glub kept saying, in his skeptical manner, "the natives of this place must have been a very low order of aborigines. Seeing that this is all we can unearth, how could they have built sky-reaching towers?"

"But you forget the time that has passed," Ar-glar would chide him, patiently. "In much less than two thousand years, the steel would rust away, the towers would collapse, and the ruins would be covered by the accretions of centuries. The only thing I cannot understand is what originally depopulated the country. Perhaps a change of climate. Perhaps some great plague. Perhaps that the people were unfit to survive. But, in due time, we shall find out. After we have finished excavating, we will take a look through the time-radio. And then we shall know everything."

"Yes, then we shall know everything!" the others would grunt, with murmurs of satisfaction, as they bent over their picks and spades.

It was, however, to be several weeks before this prediction could be fulfilled. Then, having excavated many acres and made no new finds were exciting than a yellowed old set of false teeth, some fire-scoured building stones, and some scattered fragments of wine bottles, the leader gave an order that set all his followers to chattering enthusiastically.

Responsive to his commands, they hastened to their boat, and drew out a curious-looking instrument of about the size and shape of a large chest, but composed of an intricacy of metallic tubes, vials and rods unsurpassed by the most complicated mechanism of any age. Tugging and straining, they hauled the apparatus over a road they had prepared across the snowy earth; and, after about two hours, reached the scene of their excavations, where they deposited the machine in the center of a pit ten feet deep, in the midst of an accumulation of archaeological relics. Above the instrument they then erected a screen about

twelve foot square, composed of a glistening white cloth; into little sockets at the side of the machine they adjusted a series of wires, ending in little telephone-like contrivances, two of which each man clapped over his ears; then Ar-glar pressed a tiny button, and was greeted by a series of blue flashes testifying that the storage batteries were in working order.

"My friends," declared the leader, while his men, removing their ear-phones, stood about attentively listening, "my friends, I cannot guarantee the success of this experiment. But the time-radio—or, rather, the time-radio-televisor—has already achieved remarkable results. You know, of course, the principles behind it. Long ago our scientists demonstrated that time is but the fourth dimension of space; accordingly, since we can build radios that penetrate the first three dimensions of space, why not construct a machine that will pierce the fourth dimension as well, and show us past and future events? We have not yet been successful with the future; but we have often caught radio waves from the past, and we believe that a sufficiently sensitive instrument would reveal the events happening at any particular spot throughout the ages. The reason, it is held, is that each event sets up time-vibrations in the ether at the place where it occurred; vibrations that pulsate throughout the ages, growing fainter and ever fainter, just as ordinary radio waves pulsate throughout the miles, likewise growing fainter and fainter. Of course, such time-rays, like other radio rays, are imperceptible except to the most carefully attuned mechanism. Shall we begin now?"

"Yes, yes, begin, begin!" cried the men.

IT was a strange sight that they made, that semicircle of far-abled adventurers, as they stood there before the white screen, with the ear-phones pressed to their ears; while about them the frosty pines and hemlocks croaked in the February wind. But infinitely stranger were the sights they were soon to behold and the sounds they were to hear.

Once more Ar-glar touched the little button; once more the blue sparks shot forth; then suddenly a grumbling was heard through the ear-phones, and from

a lighted disk on the instrument queer shifting shadows were reflected on to the screen.

"Be patient yet a moment," counselled the leader, while his fingers manipulated a steel dial. "It is hard to tune in on the right wave-length. Ah! there we've gone five hundred years back! . . . Seven hundred! . . . A thousand! . . . Twelve hundred! . . . This time-static is abominably annoying! . . . Fifteen hundred! Of course, we still don't see anything. Just be patient! Everything will come out all right!"

The swaying shadows on the screen were growing more sharply defined; for a tantalizing instant, they were clearly outlined, then flickered and went out; then as suddenly reappeared. "Eighteen hundred years ago!" murmured Ar-glar. . . . "Nineteen hundred years!"

For a half-second the shadows became clear again. But their form was that of wind-blown trees—of pine trees which might have been a mere reflection of those quivering behind the men at this moment.

"Two thousand years! Two thousand and fifty!" muttered Ar-glar, more to himself than to his men, none of whom could bear him. "Two thousand and—"

Suddenly he broke short, gasping in astonishment. By some magic of reception, the shadows all at once became focused with a sharpness like that of an etching. And Ar-glar and his men looked on sights such as no person of their age had ever seen or imagined in the wildest of their dreams.

For a moment they stared in a silence interrupted only by grunts of amazement. Then, from the irrepressible Boglob, there came a sudden shout of hysterical laughter.

Before them, on the screen, were rows of rectangular buildings, each with ten, twenty or thirty tiers of windows, and all crowded against their neighbors like packing-cases in a warehouse.

"Sacred whiskers of a seal! How funny! How funny!" roared Boglob. "And did people really live in such houses?"

"What a ridiculous question!" howled Blum-tar in reply. "Live in such houses! Of course not! How could they ever get up to the top?"

"Look to me like great burial

mounds," put in Wo-sun, the steersman of the boat. "Just the same, they really are marvelous. What size! What power! Their builders must have had many good qualities!"

"Perhaps—but what dreadful noises!" Blum-tar objected. "By the icebergs of the north straits! Such howls, such hoats, yelps and roars! Sounds as if the whole country was inhabited by polar bears and wolves!"

"It does sound that way," admitted Ar-glar, as he curiously regarded the little-chaired vehicles that shot back and forth at the base of the towers. "But maybe these ancient people had a different sound-sense than ours. This may have been music in their ears."

Then, after a brief silence, he continued:

"Anyhow, let's find out more about them. Now I am going to move the dial forward very slowly, advancing only by weeks and months at a turn. When we get to some important event, the pressure-register will give a leap, owing to the increased strength of the time-vibrations."

HOURS were consumed in the next phase of the investigation—hours during which, with painstaking thoroughness, a mere quarter of a century was examined. But nothing was seen that proved very enlightening; indeed, the static became so severe that for a time the men could see nothing and hear nothing. At last, growing weary of the effort, they were about to quit for the day, when suddenly the silver dial of the pressure-register shot forward, and they knew that they were in contact with some important event.

Spellbound, fawinated, horrified, they stood rooted to the spot, all of them watching and listening with taut muscles and staring eyes. For only now were they drinking deep of the long-sought revelation.

The screen, though flickering in a manner most trying to the nerves, was crossed by a number of tiny spots and patches vaguely distinguishable as masses of human beings. These were dashing back and forth at the foot of the towers in profound agitation; while a terrifying pandemonium of hoats, howls, shouts, yells, crashes and detonations burst over the bearers at the ear-phones. For some

minutes the reason for their excitement was not apparent; then suddenly a swarm of darting black craft, like gigantic dragon-flies, glided into the field of vision in the heavens above the towers. Their numbers were incalculable, and most of them were moving with almost meteoric velocity; and only when, from time to time, one of them remained poised in air with rapidly flapping wings, could it be seen that they were mere unoccupied steel shells—airplanes without human operators!

"Evidently guided here by radio-waves from a great distance," muttered Ar-glar, as, tense with excitement, he allowed his eyes to follow the scene.

From somewhere among the buildings, lightning-like flashes shot skyward; and the watchers could imagine the lurid red coloration, although all things on the screen showed in black and gray. And now and then one of the dragon-fly machines, stopping short with a convulsive shudder, would burst into flame and drop out of sight behind the dark towers.

But from the surviving machines, which continued to circle and wheel back and forth in innumerable multitudes, little spurts and flashes of light could be seen to leap earthward; and, whenever one of these struck, the roofs of the smitten buildings would glare brilliantly, and collapse like bubbles. In great distorted heaps and jumbles, the wreckage would fall to the streets, which were piled high with debris; and from the tops of the skyscrapers great blazes would dart, with a howling that could be heard even above the crash and clatter of bursting bombs and the groans and screams of terrified humans.

"So it's all true! All true!" sighed Ar-glar, momentarily removing his ear-phones, so as to relieve himself of the terrible din. "All the old traditions are true! The story of a race that committed suicide! A race that blew itself to cinders!"

"But why would they do such a thing?" questioned Wo-sun, who also had hung off his ear-phones. "Why? Such bestiality! It is impossible to imagine any reason!"

Ar-glar opened his mouth to reply—but at this point the attention of both men was diverted by the amazed shouts and mutterings of their companions. "Look! Look! By the white gods, see

that! What can that be? By the—"

Ar-glar and Worm turned their attention back again to the screen—but just an instant too late! "The static! The cursed static!" they cried. A huge irregular flickering patch had all but obliterated the scene!

When, after several minutes, the interference had ceased, the spectacle had changed strikingly. The dragon-fly craft had mostly disappeared from the sky; but on the street level, among the pavements littered with charred and smoldering ruins, a cloud of drifting black smoke was weaving its way with serpent-like convolutions. Spreading with deceptive velocity, it quickly occupied every street and byway; while thousands of men, women and children, like terrified wild beasts, fled pellmell before its advance, pushing, shoving, clamoring, tripping over one another's heels, falling over one another, trampling one another in their frenzy to escape. But the cloud of smoke, as if driven by some demonic power, moved with a speed surpassing that of the exhausted, self-impeding throng; relentlessly it overtook the slower-footed fugitives, who, shrieking with dread, gasping, panting and staggering, inhaled the noisome fumes.

"A close-up! Come, quick, a close-up!" cried Ar-glar, almost beside himself with horrified agitation. And his deft fingers manipulated the screws and levers of the time-radio; and instantly, thanks to a magnifying mirror, the figures on the screen expanded until individuals were recognizable amid the multitude.

BUT what individuals! One glimpse was sufficient. For the remainder of his days, Ar-glar was to carry with him the vision of those poison-ridden creatures; of children, their faces contorted with almost demonic convulsions, writhing on the ground in their last paroxysms; of men, who, with the bulging eyes and the gasping expression of hanged wretches, staggered and fell and were crushed by the heels of maddened companions; of women, who, ghostly as caricatures with the gas-masks that disfigured their faces, were overtaken by the indiscriminate foe and fell into the growing heaps of the fallen, among which here and there a half-closed battered eye looked out tragically or a protruding

limb spasmodically twitched. . . .

"No more! Let's see no more!" shrieked Blum-ter; while the leader, hurriedly turning another lever, switched that nightmare close-up out of view. . . .

"Thank the gods, all that was ended two thousand years ago!" sighed Ar-glar, in profound relief.

"Thank the gods, men are more civilized today!" ejaculated Bo-glub.

Even while he was speaking, the towers underwent a new transformation. Though broken and battered in a thousand places, they still remained largely intact . . . until suddenly the ears of the men were struck by a new series of detonations, so loud that they could no longer endure to listen. It was as if some giant hand, reaching from beneath the ground, had seized the whole great mass of buildings and tossed it suddenly skyward; they all lunged into air like great rocks beneath the impact of dynamite; for a breathless fraction of an instant they seemed poised between heaven and earth; then, all together, they turned sideways and toppled, their walls fell apart, their roofs blew in a thousand directions; and their ribbed steel skeletons, with wiry twists and contortions, showed from amid the monster flames and the black funnels of smoke as the whole crazy tangle gradually settled into place on the ruined ground.

"Enough! Enough! Enough! We have seen enough!" wailed all the men, in one voice; and Ar-glar, as he pressed a button and stopped the time-radio, groaned at the very thought of what he had beheld.

A silence intervened—a long, burdened silence during which the men regarded one another with anxious, haggard expressions.

Then Ar-glar, his face drawn and blanched, slowly declared:

"So they are not true, after all! Not true! The traditions mocked at by our fathers tell less than half the truth!"

"Less than half the truth?" Blum-ter concurred. "Yet see! The Madmen of the South were not mere mythical monsters! They actually existed! By poison gas and disease they wiped themselves out till not one man was left—not one man!—and we Eskimos inherited the earth."

"The survival of the fittest!" muttered Ar-glar; while, impatiently turn-

ing aside, he began to fold up the levers and accessories of the time-radio. "Come, let us depart!" he ordered. "This place is unholy! We must not profane ourselves by remaining, lest the pollution of the past enter into us!"

With hasty movements, the men took down the white screen and prepared to withdraw the time-radio.

"We know not what the cause," Arglar ruminated, as they worked, "but these ancient barbarians were afflicted with some disease, which made them want to kill one another. Apparently it was like the hydrophobia that maddens our dogs. So this is what I have been thinking, my comrades. When we return to our good homes, let us not distress our kinsmen by telling what we have seen. Else, they too, may come here to investigate; and—who knows?—some germs of the ancient disease may linger in this soil, and they may contract it and end by destroying us all, after the manner of the lunatics of old. Therefore, let us say that we have found nothing. Let us cast aside all our relics, valuable though the museums would find them!"

"Wise words! Wise words!" mur-

mured Blum-tar; and all the men nodded in agreement. "Let the Madmen of the South remain no more than a fabulous legend!"

AN hour later, the adventurers stood by the river, solemnly dropping into the waves all the objects accumulated during their weeks of labor, the fragments of glass, the splintered crockery, the desiccated bones, the fireburnt building stones, the shattered particles of platinum and of gold. . . .

Early the next morning, the Viking-like boat, with its covering of white, might have been seen to propel itself away from the shore of the island and northward up the smooth reaches of the stream. Faster and faster it went, while two great eagles wheeled above it curiously; in half an hour it had diminished to a little glittering point, which soon faded into nothingness. And once again the peace of utter isolation had settled over the tree-grown slopes and un navigated rivers and bay; and in the solitude of the unbroken waste one would have seen no sign that man had ever inhabited these parts.

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MONSTERS OF THE MOUNTAIN

By LEON BYRNE

In the hands of that unscrupulous fiend was scientific knowledge that made savage behemoths of common domestic pets!

COME quickly to the Pines . . . Bring many men with you, heavily armed . . . A terrible danger faces mankind . . . Beware of—"

That much of the message I got, and no more. As he gasped out those last words I could see Dr. Mann turn his head, stare fearfully at the shadowy object that had suddenly loomed up behind him—then there was a crash, a gasp of pain, and the old doctor's face and voice faded into nothingness as the television grid

before me went blank.

I tried frantically to reestablish contact with him, repeating his station call time after time, but no further message came through, nor could the prying eye of my powerful range-finding set again peer into the interior of that little room in the Pines, as he called his laboratory high up in the secluded fastness of the Olympic Mountains, many miles from civilization, even from any road. Whoever or whatever had attacked Dr. Mann, my old friend and professor, had ap-



Selective breeding could enlarge a species to twice its normal size, I know, but these monsters were beyond imagination, were scientific impossibilities!

parently smashed his radiovision machine.

When I had visited the professor there the previous summer I had voiced wonderment at his selection of such an isolated spot for his workshop.

"Isolated!" he had snorted. "I only wish I could find isolation. There is no privacy for man any more—science had ruined all that. Man and his machines—" he shook his head. "When you live in a crowded city, you push a button, and you see into your neighbor's home. You push another button, and you hear what he is saying. You place a man in front of a machine and you read his thoughts. When you are hungry, you throw chemicals into a contrivance that converts them into concentrated tablets of vitamin-energy—which you eat and call food.

"I remember, years ago when I was a child, how men tilled the soil, or raised herds and flocks for food. That is why I have come up here—to be where there is still a bit of nature left."

But now, when mysterious danger threatened my old friend, he was too desperately far from the intimacy and safety of the smoothly organized centers of scientific living he had criticized. I knew it would take time, precious time, to gather a group of men to go with me, and that look of terror in the professor's face as it had faded from the radio grid told me that even seconds were not to be lost.

I hurriedly strapped on a Halley-ray projector—a gun capable of melting tungsten at fifty yards—and ran up to the roof. The bullet-nosed gyrocopter slid out of its shed onto the take-off platform as I threw my voice against the resonator-release, and in another moment I was soaring straight up into space. I set the automatic pilot at due north, and shoved the throttle wide open.

It had been exactly three o'clock when Dr. Mann's message came through to me; it was not more than half an hour later that I had covered the three hundred miles up into the wilderness, and sighted the little clearing ahead and below where the doctor's house nestled in the pine-clad hills.

CAUTION warned me against landing there. I selected an open spot some two miles away, dropped quickly to

earth and climbed out. I struck out across the clearing toward a trail I knew lay at its edge, and as I plunged into the forest of towering firs and pines, whose height and density shut out all sunlight, some inner sense warned me that I was treading a trail at whose end lay danger, but no ordinary danger. I knew the phlegmatic Dr. Mann well, and I knew that neither man nor devil could ordinarily arouse fear in him, yet there had been frantic urgency in his appeal—

I stopped dead in my tracks, staring in disbelief at the thing I saw squatting in the shadowy trail ahead. At first I thought it was a Newfoundland dog, a huge brute more than four feet long, but no dog ever had those ears, those facelike protuberances that stood up a foot above the creature's head.

Tingling with excitement, I reached down, seized the butt of my holstered projector, and then the animal raised its head from the clump of grass on which it had been feeding, and saw me.

"A rabbit!" I gasped, and at the sound of my voice the creature gave one prodigious leap and disappeared into the heavy underbrush. Still refusing to believe what my eyes had shown me, I pushed ahead to the spot where it had been eating, my ray-gun at the ready. No, my eyes had not lied—those prints in the spongy earth, big as snowshoes, were rabbit prints, magnified many times.

But, a rabbit as big as a wolf—it was a scientific impossibility! Selective breeding might enlarge a species to twice its normal size, but selective breeding could not produce monsters such as I had just seen.

Keenly alert, I hurried on up the trail, and although my eyes, continually darting all about me, could see nothing, I could not shake off a feeling that I was being followed. Once, off to the left, I thought I saw a huge, formless shape sinking along in the gloom of the moss carpeted forest, but I could hear no sound save the swift rustle of my own feet on the trail, nor had I been misled by the time I came out into the clearing that surrounded Hugo Mann's shade.

I paused for a moment before stepping from the protective shadow of the woods, and as my gaze swept over the still scene, that ominous premonition came creeping back to me. No living thing stirred about the house—which in itself was a sinister

enough open—but it was another curious fact which troubled me most.

When I had visited Dr. Mann last, the acres of stumpled beyond the house had been well stocked with cows and sheep—at least a hundred of the latter—which the doctor used in his experiments. Now the pastures were bare; there was absolutely no sign of any kind of life in the entire bleak scene.

I shoved the projector into its holster, started warily across the clearing toward the massive structure of logs and quarried stone, built in the style of an old Swiss chalet of the twentieth century. As I traversed the rough and broken ground I made a startling and gruesome discovery. Scattered about in profusion were countless bones and bone fragments, some with strands of flesh still adhering to them. Crimson splatters marked the earth, pools of dried and caking blood.

It was impossible to tell if the bones were human or animal, for they were crushed and splintered beyond identification. It was as though I was treading the feeding ground of some giant prehistoric carnivore, and I hurried on, my fears for the safety of Dr. Mann rising at each step.

As I approached the two-story cabin I saw that its appearance, too, had changed. Heavy iron bars had been placed over the windows. To keep someone imprisoned within, I wondered, or to keep something out?

Gripping the butt of the ray gun in its holster, I rapped on the door. There was no answer. I rapped again, calling Dr. Mann's name. My call echoed and died in mocking silence. I seized the doorknob and turned it. Again I was surprised, for the door was unlocked. I swung it open and strode in, my eyes darting about the huge room that occupied most of the lower floor of the house. Dr. Mann was a hunting enthusiast—although he seemed modern weapons as being sportsmanlike—and he had designated this main hall of the chalet as a hunting lodge. The place seemed to be in precise order, the trophies and the archaic rifles and shot-guns on the walls unaltered.

I closed the door behind me and advanced into the room, the far corners of which were already obscured by the dusky shadows of evening. There was no sign of disorder, or of anything unusual.

Dr. Mann's laboratory, I knew, was in the basement, but his study was on this floor, at the side of the main hall, and I strode over to it, pushed the door open.

It was a scene of wild disorder; papers strewn about the floor, filing cases hanging open. I started to enter.

"If you do not mind—" The voice, menacing in its quietness, came from behind me, and with a gasp of alarm I whirled around, half jerking the projector from its holster.

A half-smile twisted the lips of the pallid faced man at my elbow, a smile of amusement at my alarm. "I would not go in there, if you do not mind," he went on tonelessly. "I do not believe the professor would like it." He stood there immobile, his hands at his sides, his lidded eyes staring into mine without a flicker.

"Who are you?" I demanded. "And where is Dr. Mann?"

"I am Antonio Peronetti, the doctor's assistant," he said. "Dr. Mann left this morning on urgent business. He will be back tonight, if you would care to wait for him."

I took a step back and looked at the man closely. He was slender and wiry—he reminded me of a little black snake, with his smoky black eyes and slick black hair. I knew he was lying—he might be Dr. Mann's assistant, but the doctor had not left here this morning, for the doctor's message had been sent but an hour ago.

"I suppose the doctor upset his study like this before he left," I said, making no effort to mask my skepticism or to hide the fact that my hand was fingering the half-drawn ray gun.

"The doctor is a very careless man," he shrugged, and I could tell by his contemptuous tone that he neither feared the gun nor myself. He had the air of a man who knew he was in supreme control of a situation, who was merely biding his time patiently while events shaped themselves.

"Those bones out in front—where did they come from?" I pressed him.

Again he smiled slightly, deprecatingly, like a man who is enjoying some jest of his own. "It is a very wild country hereabouts," he said, "as you probably know. The predatory animals seem to be increasing at an alarming

rate. It's hardly safe, in fact, to venture outside the house after dark."

I knew he was mocking me then, for the shadows of night were already falling across the clearing, and he knew that I had no choice but to stay here in the chalet—just as he knew what had happened to Dr. Mann, just as he knew the secret of the mystery that enshrouded this far place, with its grisly slaughter-yard. I knew, too, that there must be a showdown, and that it must come quickly.

"You're lying, Peresmeni," I said coldly. "Dr. Mann hasn't left this house. He's here now, and I'm going to find him."

"Are you?" His black eyes flickering defiantly for a moment. Then he inclined his head in mock submission. "I will help you look for him. Shall we start with the upstairs rooms?"

Perhaps it was the sense of security imparted by the gun in my hand, perhaps I was foolish to trust this man with the snakelike eyes for even one second, but I entered the trap all too easily. Together we went up the stairs, and together we marched down the hall to the front rooms. He reached out, pushed open a door.

"As you probably know, if you are a friend of the doctor's," he said, "this is the guest room. If you will just step in and look around—"

As I stepped through the doorway I said, "All right, but you're staying with me—" and I got no farther. With the quickness of a striking snake he threw his weight against me, knocking me forward into the room. As I caught myself and flung around, I saw the door swinging shut behind me. I lunged for it, seized the knob, but even as my fingers touched it I heard a bar being slid into place on the other side of the portal.

I hurled my body against it, but it was made of some diamond-hard metal alloy, did not even quiver. With an oath I jerked out the ray gun, sent a shot splintering against the panel. Whatever the composition of the door, it seemed impervious to the powerful ray. I heard a quiet chuckle from the other side of the door, then silence.

I ran to the window, threw it open, tugged at the bars. They were fastened on the outside, fastened solidly, and they were apparently of the same metal as the door. Panting helpless with rage,

I stood in the middle of the room and glared about me. There was but one possible way out, a slim chance—

I had started toward a wall of the room when I suddenly stopped, my ears caught by a low, piteous sobbing. I listened intently an instant—yes, it was a woman's voice, and it came from the room next the one in which I was imprisoned. I tapped softly on the wall, waited, tapped again. The sobbing abruptly stopped, and when I tapped again I heard an answering knock from the other side of the wall.

I put my lips close to it and said, "Who are you, and what is wrong?"

For an instant there was no answer, then came a faintly murmured: "I am Joyce Phillips, Dr. Mann's niece. I came here to visit him two weeks ago, and—oh, help me, please help me!"

"What is it?" I said urgently. "Where is Dr. Mann, and what is this fellow Peresmeni up to? I am Tom Thorp, a friend."

"I don't know where Uncle Hugo is," came the frightened, muffled reply. "I have been locked in here so long—and he, that terrible creature Peresmeni—" She stopped, and I could hear faint sobbing for an instant. "Now he will turn me over to the monsters too, as he has threatened to do to me unless I give in to him—"

"Tell me!" I said quickly. "What are these monsters?"

BUT from beyond the wall came no further words—only a snarl, the bestial snarl of Peresmeni, and a short, quick cry of fear from the girl, followed by the scuffling sounds of a struggle. I raised my gun, was about to blast away at the wall, when I realized that I could not take that chance. The wall was not of metal, and I knew the gun should be able to bore through it, but I had no way of knowing whether the girl would be in the line of fire.

While night crept down and all but obliterated the grounds outside the window I waited, and suddenly the hair seemed to rise up at the back of my neck and the blood turned cold in my veins. From out there in the shadowy forest came a scream, a horrible, nerve-shattering wail, the cry of a panther that had struck the blood trail.

But this was no ordinary panther

scream—it was as though fifty savage throats had joined in unison to raise that desolating, reverberating howl, and the floor under my feet trembled at the violence and the volume of it. It was not the scream of an ordinary panther—it was the scream of a monster.

And as I strained my eyes to peer out into the gloom a huge shapeless bulk loomed up at the timber's edge, moved with slinking ponderosity toward the house.

I gasped in disbelief, and for a moment I knew stark, unreasoning fear, for as a stray beam of moonshine from the cloud-scudded sky struck and illuminated that tawny mass undulating forward across the clearing, I realized that it was a panther, but a panther such as even prehistoric man had never seen.

From shoulder to paws it stood six feet above the ground, and it must have been thirty feet long. The ferocious looking head, now lowered to the ground, now lifted to sniff the breeze, was as big as a barrel. On it came toward the house, and when it was halfway across the clearing there was the sound of a sliding door being opened and quickly shut again in the shed beside the house.

In that brief interval a creature bounded out into the open, a creature that looked like a huge dog. It was not a dog—it was a rabbit, an animal as large as the one I had encountered on the trail through the woods. Panic stricken, it looked about helplessly for a moment, then bounded off in gigantic leaps across the clearing. But, fast and huge as it was, it had no chance for its life.

With a growl like the roar of a lion the huge panther was after it, and in two pouncing leaps brought it down. The stricken beast made no sound as it died, but as the ravenous jaws of the eat monster mangled bone and flesh in an orgy of destruction the night became a hideous bedlam. It was sickening and terrifying, but it did not last long, for the slaving cougar's appetite seemed insatiable, and it pulped down skin and flesh as though they were froth.

Then, from below, the beam of a powerful flash darted out from the house, straight into the glaring eyes of the eat, and with a snarl it turned, went slinking back into the forest. I could hear the heavy front door being opened, and a figure carrying a light-colored burden

over its shoulder darted out of the house.

It was Personeni, carrying the flashlight in one hand, and with a quick surge of horror I realized that the white form he carried was that of a woman, a girl from whom the clothing had been stripped. He ran out twenty yards, threw her to the ground, and raced back toward the house.

I thought at first that she was unconscious, for she did not rise; then I saw that she was helpless, bound hand and foot. She cried out once, in terrified appeal, and then the door below me slammed shut, and the flashlight beam stabbed out through the night as Personeni stood at a barred window and looked out at his handwork.

That light showed me a youthful, beautiful face, drawn now with terror, and in the brief instant before the light flashed out I saw another thing. Her eyes—I could mark their mute pleading even at that distance—were not directed at Personeni, but up at the window where I stood.

I knew what she meant, and I brought up the ray projector swiftly, aimed at her head to give her quick and decent death. As quickly, I lowered the gun, and I swore mightily. If there was a God above he would not let her die out there as long as I had a fighting chance to save her.

I ran to the wall of the next room, held the muzzle of the gun against it, and squeezed the trigger. Hot sparks splattered back over my hand, and for an instant I feared the wall was impregnable. Then with a roar the Halley-ray scored its way through the partition. I moved it gradually about in a circle until I had made an aperture large enough for my body. I had not quite finished the circle when the gun sputtered and died. I dropped it, put blistered hands to the shattered panel, battered the obstruction out of the way.

THEN I was through the opening and I out into the hall, racing down the stairs, pounding out into the big hunting room. Personeni was not there—he had heard me coming and did not know my ray gun was empty—but there were other guns there that were not empty, guns of a bygone day. I dashed to a gearrack on the wall, seized a rifle and snapped open the breech. It had no bul-

late. I tried another, and it too was empty. In desperation I grabbed the only remaining weapon, a single-barreled shotgun, saw that it held a charge, and raced from the house with it.

It was a mad, hopeless gesture, for a charge of buckshot would little more than puncture that monster's hide, and I would be as helpless a prey as the naked girl who lay trussed on the ground out there.

The giant cat had scented her, was slinking in for the kill, and I knew that death for the girl and myself was to be as swift as it was horrible. Yet, strangely enough, fear was not my predominant emotion as I sped forward to certain destruction—I felt, rather, a gnawing curiosity to learn the secret of this grim riddle of monstrous beasts and monstrous malice. How could such creatures as this exist—what had caused them?

But I had no time for thought now, for those two green balls of fire that were the panther's eyes were looming up ahead of me like the twin lights of an onrushing car, and as I leaped past the pallid form of Joyce Phillips I raised the shotgun to my shoulder and fired. I ran.

The two green lights went out, like lanterns struck by a rock, and with a deafening roar of pain and rage the blinded animal leaped high in the air, came down with a crash that shook the earth. A fighting, howling, fury, it thrashed about, spitting, clawing, tearing up great clods of turf, deafening me with its screams. It had been fifty feet away when the shot struck its eyes, yet its forward momentum carried it up to my feet.

A monster paw swished past my face as I hurled myself backward, then I had seized the soft and trembling form of Joyce Phillips from the ground and was racing back toward the house with her. How we escaped that writhing mountain of flesh I do not know, nor how we reached the stout door alive, but reach it we did, and as I lunged through it, and spun about to shove the bolts into place, I had a glimpse of the sightless, maddened animal rushing off blindly into the forest.

I lowered the girl to her feet, straightened up swiftly to look around for Personeni, and saw, too late, her wide-eyed look of terror. Something flicked down

before my eyes, snapped about my neck and caught there like a ring of fire. Too late I realized that Personeni had been standing behind the door when I entered, for the garrote he had slipped over my head strangled me into unconsciousness before I could even begin to struggle.

It was the gagging effort of my own tortured throat to draw in breath that brought me to, and the pain of consciousness was so great I could not help groaning aloud. I felt as though I had been beaten with clubs, as though every bone in my body had been broken, and then, by the dim moon glow coming in through a small window, high up, I saw the reason why.

I was lying on a cement floor, at the bottom of a cement stairway, and the pressure on my wrists and ankles told me that after garroting me, Personeni had flung me headlong down the stairs into the basement.

Dizzy and sick, I struggled to a sitting position, and then I realized that if the fall had nearly broken my neck it had done something else for me. The bonds must have been tied hastily, for the lurching of my body had loosened them, and after a brief struggle I had my hands free, then my feet, and as I staggered erect I vowed grimly that when next I met Personeni I would be ready for him, and I would kill him quickly, and without compunction.

Noislessly I crept up the stairs and tried the door. It was unlocked—he had either thought me killed by the fall or he had been too interested in getting back to Joyce Phillips to trouble about locking it. I started to open it, then paused. I must have a weapon before I charged out at him, even if only a club, for by now I realized that he was probably armed.

I felt my way down the stairs again, groped about among the paraphernalia and tools stored there. I found a heavy axe, but discarded it as too cumbersome; then my seeking fingers grasped a two-tined pitchfork, and I smiled grimly as I took the ancient but effective weapon—I would soon find out what kind of stuffing the little snake upstairs had in him.

THEN for no apparent reason, the backles at the back of my neck again began to rise, and I stood rooted in the darkness, trembling with an indefinable

fear, a premonition of horrible and impending danger. Perhaps it was the odor that came to my nostrils, the dank, clammy, poisonous reek of slimy things, of scaly reptiles. There was a sudden breath of hot air against my cheek, numbing me, and I put up my hand before my face to ward off the unseen menace.

My fingers brushed against an iron grille, and I realized that I was standing beside the heavy plank door, with its tiny barred window, that separated this half of the cellar from the doctor's experimental laboratory. There was something in there, something unclean and malignant and inhuman, something so dreadful that its odor was unbearable.

I started to draw away, in loathing and disgust, when a pillar of light flashed downward from ceiling to floor of the room beyond the door. Someone had opened a trapdoor in the floor above, and by the light that came streaming down I was able to see, and to shudder at, this supreme monstrosity of all the terrible creatures that had made a devil's playground of Dr. Mann's chalet.

Coiled up upon itself at the far end of the room, it glared in beady eyed malevolence at the light. Its head stirred, lifted, and a ripple of angry movement flowed backward from the head, coursed down through tons of scaly flesh to end in a thrumming like the beating of huge tom-toms as the tail thumped against the stone wall. It was a snake, but no snake such as man had ever dreamed of in wildest nightmare. Three feet thick in the middle, its length must have measured close to seventy feet.

Then, while I stared in incredulous horror, a pair of naked white feet dangled over the trapdoor opening, started downward. Slowly, inch by inch, the body of Joyce Phillips was lowered into the basement, supported by a rope tied under her armpits. When she was still a foot from the floor the rope was released from above, and she fell in a crumpled heap.

The fall snapped her out of the stupor that had gripped her, and she struggled to her feet, stared about her. Then she saw that hideous, incredible monster at the far end of the room, and she screamed wildly, despairingly.

As she did, the saber-fanged monstrosity's beady eyes glared venomously at her, and its forked red tongue lashed out like a fiery brand of doom. The coils

of its ponderous body undulated as it drew itself together to strike. Above, at the trapdoor, I had a fleeting glimpse of a face distorted with gloating malice, the face of Perenseni.

Then I was clawing madly at the door in front of me, groping with torn and bloody fingers for the belts that held it locked. I found them, two heavy steel bars, and I jerked them back, flung the door wide. I knew, as I had known out there in the yard, that I was only rushing forward to gruesome destruction, but I knew also, now, that these devil-spawned monstrosities were vulnerable in at least one spot.

As I darted into the snake-room I screamed at Joyce: "Run! Run for the door!" and as the monster drew back its head in the instant before striking I grasped the pitchfork in my right hand, hurled it harpoon-like with all my strength straight at those evil eyes.

There was a sudden sickening splash, like the sound of an icepick being jabbed into a pumpkin, a splashing of obscene liquid from the twin founts of the reptile's eyes as the tines of the pitchfork pierced them, and then the very foundations of the house shook with the fury of the injured thing's writhings.

It struck, but it struck blindly, and that hideous head with its punctured eyes shot harmlessly past me, past the fleeing form of Joyce Phillips, to land with smashing, rending impact against the rim of the trapdoor, the trapdoor at which Antonio Perenseni had been kneeling.

As I swept the girl before me through the door I had a fleeting impression of a body hurtling downward from that square of light, to land screaming in the midst of those convulsively writhing coils, and as I slammed the door shut behind us and threw the belts I had one brief glimpse of a human form that was suddenly no longer human, nor a form, but a bloody and broken smear. Then I was racing past the girl, up the stairs to the floor above, to jam shut and lock the trapdoor against the grisly scene.

"It was my fault for confiding so important a discovery to a man of small soul," Hugo Mann was explaining hours afterward, after we had found and released him from the little attic room where Perenseni had kept him im-

prisoned. The doctor's fiery spirit was undimmed despite the tortures his frail, seventy-year-old body had undergone during the past week.

"That thing in the basement," he went on, "we'll destroy it with chemicals, if it does not soon die of hunger—just as the blinded creature in the woods will very soon die of hunger. The extract, you see, while it stimulates growth prodigiously, also makes necessary ever increasing amounts of food."

HE swung his eyes from Joyce's to mine. "You know, Tom, ever since I retired from teaching I have been experimenting up here with theories on glandular development. Men have known for many decades that certain glands control growth and bodily development, that inactive or too active glands cause dwarfs and giants.

"I have made no startling new discovery—I have merely carried on the research until I have achieved a compound, derived from many sources, which will cause an organism to absorb all nutriment it consumes, accelerating and affecting the metabolism in such a way that growth is rapid and inevitable.

"Given to mankind, this discovery could work untold benefit in the development of the race. In the hands of an

unscrupulous man, it could be put to fantastic and fiendish uses.

"Personeni, who has been my helper for the last half year, learned the secret, and you have seen what he has done with it. He learned it just two weeks ago, when Joyce," he looked fondly at his niece, "came up here to visit me.

"He began using it on animals. When I learned what he was up to I promptly discharged him—but he had others plans. Before we could protect ourselves he made prisoners of Joyce and myself. When Joyce spurned his advances, his twisted brain resolved on a punishment for her—to feed her to the monsters her uncle's discovery made possible.

"I, too, he was going to destroy in the same way, to seal my lips before he departed with his secret, a secret that could make him fabulously rich or fabulously powerful. It was only by chance that his vigilance relaxed today, enabling me to slip into the radio room and attempt to get a message through to you, whom I knew might respond quickly. I am thankful of course that my message did reach you, and that you came, but I realize that my calling you almost cost your life—"

I turned my eyes from him to Joyce Phillips. I had heard only the first part of his sentence. "So am I, doctor," I interrupted to reply.

CASH PRIZES!

Which story in this issue of **MAVEL SCIENCE STORIES** do you like best—and why? The editor wants you to determine the editorial policy of **MAVEL SCIENCE STORIES**, and for the best letters on that subject, based on the stories in this volume 1, Number 1, he is offering the following prizes: \$25.00 for the winning letter, \$15.00 for the second best, \$10.00 for the third—and for the next five, one-year subscriptions to **MAVEL SCIENCE STORIES**.

You will see that some of the stories lean heavily toward pure vapor science, with others emphasizing human interest—while still others combine equally both vapor science and human interest.

What kind of story do you want to predominate hereafter in **MAVEL SCIENCE STORIES**, and why? And also, do you like the book-length novel, or would you prefer more short stories? The editor is depending completely on you, the reader, to determine the policy of the magazine hereafter, so don't fail him! Your opinion can be 10 words or 300; length will have no bearing on the editor's selection of the best opinion.

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MAVEL
SCIENCE STORIES

The Magazine of Super Science Fiction



AVENGERS OF SPACE

Thrilling, Feature-Length, Future-Science

NOVEL by HENRY KUTTNER

CHAPTER I

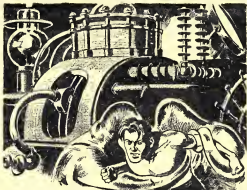
INTO THE VOID

TERRY SHAWN was worried. The reporter should have been here hours ago. According to long-made plans, the *Eagle* would make its first flight from this lonely Arizona valley at six o'clock—

darkness and shaded his eyes. Far in the distance he could see the headlights of an automobile—no, several of them—racing over the valley road. Grunting, Shawn went to a huge shed that towered not far away. He kicked open a door and yelled:

"Get ready, boys! He's on the way."

Within the great barn was a shimmering sphere of metal, the *Eagle*, first spaceship ever to be built on Earth. Months



Terry Shawn and his Eagle crew roared through the interstellar spaces bent on avenging Earth's destruction by spaceships of another planet—and faced the strangest destiny ever encountered by man!

blackened briar, puffing out noxious clouds of smoke. He was Sam Hedley, a noted physicist from whom Shawn had learned the fundamentals of science.

"Best time," the little man smiled, ambling toward the door. "Imagine holding up the start for a leazy reporter."

"We had to keep our end of the bargain," Shawn said sourly. "Lord knows we needed the money the Tribune advanced. It took plenty of dough to build the *Eagle*. I spent weeks trying to convince the publisher it'd be worth his while to back us."

Hedley came to peer out into the night. "Well, he's made a good investment. Drove a hard bargain, too. Fifteen per cent of the profits."

"I'd laugh if there weren't any profits," Shawn chuckled.

"Oh, there will be. The Moon's virgin territory, a whole new world, with minerals waiting to be dug up. We'll get gold, old right, and silver—and precious stones, I'll bet. Blast this pipe!"

The pseudopods that gripped Shawn's arm tightened. He had to watch while the robot brought the needle down.

Hedley found a match and lit his dead tobacco.

SHAWN said, "Wait a minute!" He listened. The faint crackle of gunfire came to their ears.

Swiftly, Shawn moved. He leaped to a switchboard behind the door, flung down levers. The bright glare of the arc lamps died. Now the headlights of the approaching cars were clearly visible—and so were the occasional flashes of exploding weapons.

"Wait the devil!" Hedley snapped. "They're—"

"International Power men, I'll bet," Shawn's lean face was set in a hard grin.



and it was long past that time now Shawn's lean, tanned face was angry in the cold glare of arc lights as he slumped up and down, swinging his arms to keep warm.

Abruptly he stiffened, stepped into the

of careful planning and construction had gone into it, the culmination of years of atomic experimentation by Shawn. From a porthole dangled a rope ladder, and down this scrambled a man, wizened and agile as a monkey. He was chewing a

The tall, muscular fighting-machine of his body swung into action.

"Pete!" he yelled, "Hooker!" He sprang toward a gun-rack near by, lifted out a rifle and a heavy, snout-nosed automatic.

In the *Eagle's* open porthole two faces showed—Hooker Flynn, ex-prizefighter, a huge dull-faced gorilla of a man; Pete Frost, astronomer, with a keen dark face handsome as a movie idol's and a brain as cold and accurate as polished beryllium-steel.

"What's up, Terry?" Hooker Flynn rumbled.

"Trouble," Shawn shouted. "Start the engine. We may have to take off in a hurry. Don't know how many guys are coming—"

The two heads vanished; Shawn retreated to the door. At his side was Hefley, armed, puffing frantically on his pipe.

The rattle of gunfire grew louder. The howl of straining engines shrieked through the night. A beam of light from a car's headlight, oddly revealing, flashed briefly across the two men's figures. Then, suddenly, a black sedan thundered out of darkness, brakes screaming. It whirled in a crazy skid and toppled over sideways. Tinkles of breaking glass sounded.

"Stay here," Shawn commanded, and ran forward. He halted as a shot hit just past his head. Another automobile appeared, with men crouching on the running boards, guns in their hands.

Shawn flung up his gun in a quick snap shot. One of the killers screamed, lost his hold, and went hurtling through the air, a dark figure that rolled over and over in the dust to lay still at last. The car made a quick swerve, circled back into the gloom. Shawn ran to the overturned auto as he saw a white hand groping through the broken window.

He peered down, saw a pale face staring up at him, blue eyes fear-filled. "Wait a minute," he said, and whipped off his coat, wrapping it around his feet. He started to break off the sharp edges of glass that rimmed the window-frame. But a cry from Hefley made him change his mind.

"Hurry up, Terry! They're coming—"

Shots crashed. Shawn swiftly put his coat inside the window-frame, grabbed

the arms that reached up to him. He pulled the occupant of the car out, realising with a sudden shock that it was a girl, red hair flying in mad disarray.

The glass that remained played havoc with the girl's dress, ripping it nearly off her slim body. For a second Shawn felt the warm firmness of her half-bared bosom hot against his cheek. Even at that moment the blood pounded dizzily in his temples at the girl's alluring nearness, at the musky perfume that was strong in his nostrils. Shawn's throat felt dry. His pulses beat faster at the touch of his hands upon her rounded, vibrant body. All he seemed able to think of was that this girl was beautiful, and that he had never before felt as he did now.

She slid down, staring around with frightened eyes, and Shawn stopped held his breath. The night breeze was icy on his perspiration-wet face. Then he looked down and whispered an oath.

There was another body left in the car. Shawn made a motion toward it, but the girl caught his arm.

"Mae's dead. They shot him—through the head. I've been driving—"

"Terry!" Hysteria edged Hefley's voice. "Terry!"

Dark figures were converging toward Shawn, grim purpose in their swift advance. Some of them were between him and the barn. Shawn's lips tightened in a crooked grin. The attackers were holding their fire—depending on numbers. Well, that was their mistake.

Shawn said under his breath, "Keep behind me. Come on!"

HE charged forward in purposeful silence, bearing the quick patter of the girl's footsteps. Then, suddenly, he was in the midst of a tangle of cursing, snarling men, too nonplussed by Shawn's unexpected action to move in accord. A gun clutched down at Shawn's head. He jerked aside, felt numbing pain lance through his shoulder. His fists were smashing out in driving, sledgehammer blows, his big body moving forward recklessly through the circle of his attackers.

Abruptly all lights went out. In the dim starlight it was impossible to distinguish friend from foe. But Shawn managed to make out the smaller shadow that was the girl; he lunged toward her,

knocking a man aside.

"Shoot!" somebody yelled. "Don't let him get away! Shoot, damn it!"

But they couldn't shoot without a mark. Shawn felt soft, warm flesh under his hand. The girl cried out, and instantly shadows closed in on her. But Shawn had already picked up her slim body, flung her over his shoulder like a bag of meal, and, head down, ran for the barn. He could see a tiny spot of red light, glowing like a coal. Hefley, after switching off the lights, was using his pipe-embers to signal the position of the doorway.

Shawn cannoned into a slight figure, heard Hefley's reedy voice whispering urgent commands. He jumped inside the barn.

"Shut the door!"

Hefley obeyed, moved to the light-switch, turned it on. Radiance flooded the barn. Hooker Flynn was halfway down the rope-ladder that dangled from the Eagle's porthole. He was gripping a blackjack in a huge, hairy hand.

"You okay, Chief?" he rumbled.

"I told you to start the motors!" Shawn stopped. The girl wriggled free, stood gasping, an ivory statue half clothed by the tatters of her dress. Hefley was barring the door. Already the men outside were knocking at the barrier.

"We started 'em," Flynn said. "Who're those mugs, huh?"

A gun barked outside; splinters flew from the door. Shawn said sharply, "We'll have to get in the ship. Up you go, sister!" He hoisted the girl up the ladder, and she went up swiftly, with a flash of silk-clad legs and ivory, softly rounded thighs. "You too, Sam."

Hefley obeyed, and Shawn followed his example as a bellows of gunfire sounded. The door slammed open. Men yelled oaths, threats. Shawn saw Hefley's legs disappear through the port-hole and hurried himself upward desperately. Bullets sizzled around him, pinged on the spaceship's hull.

But Shawn made it, dived into the Eagle and heard the port click behind him. The noise of the attackers gave place to a silence that was unbroken save for the deep, throbbing whisper of motors.

Hefley was barring the port. The two men were in a tiny chamber, barely large enough to stand upright—the space lock.

Another door in the wall stood ajar, and Shawn scrambled through it, Hefley behind him.

They were in the Eagle's control room, a mass of intricate instruments, walls and floor and ceiling made, apparently, of frosted glass, which in reality comprised a visual screen by which Shawn could see through the walls of the craft. He touched a lever. The frosted glass brightened, and it seemed as though they looked directly out into the barn, through transparent panes. The attackers had surrounded the ship, were standing indecisively in puzzled groups, at least a dozen of them.

Shawn glanced aside as the girl, huddled in a chair, called his name.

"Mr. Shawn! They followed us for eight miles—shooting at us. I—"

"You're from the Tribes?" Shawn stared at the girl, feeling once more that curious excitement that had overwhelmed him when he had held her close during the battle. Then she had been a half-seen shadow in the darkness. Now the electric glare of the light revealed her face and figure clearly—and she was beautiful indeed, Shawn realized. Firm, pale bones peered out beneath a lace bodice—the only garment she wore above the waist, for her dress had been ripped to tatters, and milky thighs gleamed whitely through the remaining strips.

AGAIN Shawn found that his throat was dry. His heart was pounding like a trip-hammer. The girl's body was a pale flame—all madness and all delight . . .

Involuntarily she shrank a little in her chair, lifted her hands in a protective gesture, a warm flush creeping over the oval face. Shawn forced himself to look away. "You're from the Tribes?" he repeated.

"Yes," the girl said softly. "Mac was to go with you—I was driving him out here. Then these men—who were they, do you know?"

"Easy to guess that," Hefley said, polishing his pipe on a wrinkled sock. "International Power sent 'em. International's been trying to get our anti-gravity formula for months. First they tried to buy it, but we wouldn't sell. They're the most unscrupulous, crooked money-grabbers in America today."

"Yeah," Shawn said. "They've attacked us before. But I hired armed guards. Just paid 'em off tonight. If you hadn't been late — well, we won't squabble about that."

"We broke an axle," the girl said. "Had to hire another car. My name's Lorna Rand, by the way. Of the *Tri-O-uns*."

"Glad to know you," Shawn granted. "Say — I've got a hunch what those thugs were trying to do. They probably planned to get you and your friend out of the way, and then send one of their own men here, masquerading as a *Tri-O-uns* reporter. That way they could get a spy aboard the *Eagle*, and he'd watch his chance to find out what International Power wants to know."

"Five to one you're right," Hefley said. "But we'd better not stick around. Those thugs have got dynamite!"

Shawn eyed the transparent walls. The men outside were busy pulling little cylinders under the spaceship's hull, carrying rocks and dirt into the shed to bury the explosive.

"The *Eagle* may stand dynamite, but I'm not sure," Shawn observed. "We'll take off." He picked up a transmitter, called a question. A faint voice answered.

Shawn glanced at Lorna Rand. "We'll land you near the city, and your paper can send out another reporter. Now—"

"Hurry up!" Hefley warned.

Shawn's fingers flickered over the instrument panel. Instantly the interior of the shed, the men working busily outside the ship—vanished!

An intolerable oppression ground down on Shawn; he heard Hefley shout, "Too much power! Reverse it, Terry—quick!"

Shawn was trying to hold himself upright against the control board, fighting a tremendous weight that dragged him down. Hefley was on his hands and knees, white face upturned; the girl had slid down from her chair to the floor. The transparent walls were one white burst of raving flame.

They grew brighter, a blazing whirlpool before Shawn's swimming eyes. He battled desperately against the inexorable drag, realizing that something had gone wrong with the compensating gravity field within the ship, designed to avoid the serious danger of acceleration.

His brain seemed to be swelling, pressing against his skull with frightful force. He slipped down, fighting to reach a control lever with his fingers, succeeding in touching the cold behelites—

Pushing the lever over with the last remnant of his strength—

And sliding down into a black deadly abyss, unconscious, as the *Eagle* thundered unguided through interplanetary space, flashing through the airless gulfs between the worlds, to the strangest destiny man had ever encountered!

CHAPTER II

LOST PLANET

SHAWN awoke with a throbbing ache in his head, and for a moment lay staring up dazedly at a black ceiling, sprinkled with brilliant star points. Gravity was again normal. Weakly he sat up, hearing a groan from Hefley and a gasp from Lorna.

The little physicist propped himself up, blinking, as Shawn arose painfully and went to the controls. He made a few hasty adjustments.

"Terry," Hefley whispered, "We're in space. The compensator—"

"We didn't allow for initial acceleration. Or, rather — we didn't allow enough, Sam. It won't happen after this."

"Ye gods, what power we've got in these motors," Hefley said. "Look at that!" He pointed down.

On the vision screen on which they stood, far behind them, two spheres loomed, turning slowly in space, glowing with pale radiance. Earth and Moon, left far behind by the driving thrust of anti-gravity.

"Do you know how far we've come?" Shawn asked, incredulity in his voice. "I don't know how long we've been unconscious—but we've traveled more than three hundred and fifty thousand miles! We're way outside the Moon's orbit."

Hosker Flynn and Pete Trust came in, looking pale and sick. Shawn explained what had happened. Flynn's heavy face was dully uncomprehending.

"Jeez, what now, chief?" he rumbled. "Back to the Moon, huh?"

"That's the best plan, I suppose."

Shawn said, and Trost, the astronomer, seconded him.

"Yes. We'll have to make a curve—a swing through space—to get back. I'd better make some adjustments on the compensators first." He pulled a pair of horn-rimmed glasses from his pocket, adjusted them over his eyes, blinking nearsightedly. "Who's the girl, Terry?"

Shawn made the necessary introductions. "We can't ask you to go to the Moon with us," he told Lorna. "Too dangerous. It's back to Earth now, to land you—"

A cry from Hefley halted him. The little man was staring down, pointing, eyes wide. Shawn stopped in mid-sentence, cold tendrils of fear twining about him. On the vision screen at their feet was—the incredible!

Earth was growing smaller! The luminous hineness had given place to a chill blaze of green fire, and half-clouded by the emerald glow, Earth seemed to be shrinking, dwindling. And keeping pace with it shrank the Moon.

"We're going faster—" Hefley said.

"No!" Shawn glanced at the instruments. "No—we're almost stationary. It's Earth that's moving!"

He looked down again. There was something incredibly strange about the planet's shrinking. Oddly, it seemed to be racing incredibly fast, and at the same time Shawn had the inexplicable feeling that Earth was not moving in space, but was simply growing smaller, washed in the eerie green fires.

Smaller it grew, tiny as an orange, the Moon a pinpoint beside it. And abruptly Shawn felt a warning tingle course through him; a frightful shock made the spaceship reel and shudder, its frame creaking, grinding with strain. Gravitation was destroyed for an amazing second; Shawn felt himself flung through the air, felt the suction of some force that seemed to be dragging the *Eagle* down into a cosmic whirlpool. For a brief second of eternity the control room was a madstrum of writhing, twisting bodies. Lorna screamed; Flynn belched an oath. Every atom of Shawn's body was tingling with strange, unearthly strain—

It passed. The force that had gripped them was gone. They staggered to their feet, gasping. It was Lorna who first made the discovery.

She pointed down, cried out wordlessly. Hefley followed her glance. He gasped.

"The Earth! Terry—look—"

AMAZEMENT lanced through Shawn. Beneath him was the brilliant star-studded darkness of space, but where Earth and Moon should have hung was nothing. The planet and its satellite had vanished without trace.

No—not without trace. Shawn strained his eyes. He swung about, whispering an oath.

"Telescope, Sam!"

He swung the great lens, Hefley helping him, until it was focused on the spot in space where the Earth had been. Instantly on the vision screen a cloud leaped into view. A golden cloud—

"Spaceships!" Hooker Flynn rumbled. "Like the *Eagle*—huh!"

He was right. A mighty fleet of interplanetary vessels hung where Earth had once swung in its orbit, Sun-golden, torpedo-shaped, racing away and away into the outer darkness. Alien craft, sprung from the void.

Trost said coldly, adjusting his glasses. "It seems that the Earth and Moon have been destroyed. Apparently by this fleet." His keen eyes were a smouldering blaze.

"It's impossible!" Hefley whispered. "A planet—annihilated! Nothing left—"

"We saw it," Trost said with finality. "Terry, what're you doing?"

Shawn was wrenching at the controls. "We're going after those ships," he said, an angry grin on his dark face. "You're right, Pete. Earth has been destroyed. We've no weapon capable of such a thing, but races on other planets—well, they might have developed atomic control to a point where this could be done. Some sort of ultra-ionization, perhaps."

The *Eagle* flashed back in its course. On the vision screen the golden fleet grew smaller. Shawn increased the speed.

But it was useless. He was soon out-distanced. Not till the alien spaceships had vanished from the telescopic screen, lost in the immensity of space, did Shawn turn from the controls, scowling. He shrugged silently.

Not until then did the five fully realize the significance of what had happened. A thousand things flooded into their minds

—memories of their lives on Earth, people they had known and loved, hopes and plans and ideals, now vanished utterly, gone as the planet had gone. Hefley said,

"We should have been destroyed with the Earth." His meagre face was twisted.

"God, it—it's impossible."

"The man without a country had nothing on us," said Trost, snuffing sourly.

"Look—you mean the whole Earth's gone?" Flynn inquired, gripping Shawn's arm with a steeltrap grip.

"Prisco too! You don't mean—"

"Prisco, New York, Timbuctoo—the whole planet, Becker," Shawn said. He glanced at the girl, who was dabbling furtively at her eyes with a lace wisp of linen. "The question is—what now?"

It was Trost who voiced the thought in the minds of all. Polishing his glasses, he said precisely, "There are five of us. The sole representatives of Earth's civilization. We might, of course, run and hide, perhaps find some planet that would shelter us. And there would always be the chance that this golden fleet would seek us out and kill us, too. No, many people I knew and loved have died with the Earth. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord—but I vote we have a cut at a little vengeance ourselves." His flippant words were belied by the bitter rage in his cold eyes.

"He's right!" Flynn snarled. "By God, we've got our guns! And we can use 'em."

Hefley said nothing, but he nodded in agreement. Shawn said, "I suppose you all know this is suicide. We may destroy a few of the golden ships, but—"

"At least we'll have done that," Trost murmured, and Hefley added,

"Wherever those aliens are, the fact that they have power doesn't necessarily mean that they're a great deal more intelligent than we are. We've a heritage behind us, Terry—the heritage of thousands of years of civilization. We may be more successful than you think."

SHAWN turned to the girl. "What's your vote, Lorna?"

She stood up, a slim, vibrant figure, her alabaster body scarcely veiled by her tattered clothing. "We'll fight! If we can find those golden ships—"

"I doubt if they came from beyond the

System," Trost hazarded. "Even their speed wouldn't bridge the interstellar distances. It's my guess, judging from their direction, that they're headed for Mars, or else Saturn. Jupiter's on the other side of the Sun, so are the other great planets, except Pluto."

"We'll head for Mars, then," Shawn said. "But we don't want to land unprepared. Check over the arsenal, Pete. There's no telling what kind of mortals we may encounter. Maybe they'll be peaceable and maybe they won't."

Trost nodded and went out, Flynn lumbering at his heels. Shawn relinquished the controls to Hefley. He glanced at the girl.

"Maybe I can find some clothes," he granted. "Not much left of yours. Come along."

In a locker he discovered a khaki shirt and trousers and handed them to Lorna. But at the door he turned, involuntarily, at a rush of movement. The girl had slipped off the tattered remnant of her dress and was made bare for filmy underthings. The pale cones of her breasts swayed as she bent over, slipping a slim foot into the trousers.

Shawn was trembling a little, his muscles weak as water. The girl was a vision of loveliness, rousing all the passion in him. He stared fascinated at her supple form, took a half-step forward, as she drew the trousers up over the luscious swell of her hips. Then, compressing his lips, Shawn drew back, his palms moist with sweat. Silently he turned and went out, rejoining Hefley in the control room. There Lorna rejoined them presently, a boyishly slender figure in the masculine garments, auburn hair cascading about her shoulders.

The Eagle dashed on, driving relentlessly toward the red star that was Mars. Shawn's face was grim as he stood beside Hefley, one hand unconsciously gripping the cold butt of his automatic. Nevertheless, he could not keep his thoughts on the destruction of Earth; the girl beside him compelled a quickening beat of his pulse, and more than once Shawn's eyes rested on the soft curve of her cheek, veiled by the auburn curls. . . .

Steadily, surely, with a swiftness which its occupants could understand only through their sight, the ship hurtled through space.

CHAPTER III

RED WORLD OF FEAR

A CITY of domes and towers and minarets lay in the midst of a sandy plain of angry scarlet, and the Eagle sped through the thin air envelope of Mars toward it. Shawn, however, was cautious. He grounded his spaceship several miles from the metropolis, safely hidden behind a low ridge.

Halley was testing the air. "It's okay," he said. "No harmful gases. A little short on oxygen, but we can breathe it."

"What the plan?" Lorna asked. Shawn shook his head.

"We'll make it as we go along. If the golden fleet came from Mars, we've reached our destination. If not—" He pointed up. "We'll search further. Pete, come along with me. We'll scout around. The rest of you, stay in the ship."

Trost, heavily armed, opened the space lock. Shawn followed him out, pausing to say, "We'll be back before sunset."

"What if you're not?" Lorna asked him.

He touched his automatic, grinning wryly. "We will. Don't worry."

With a nod he passed through the lock and clambered down the rope ladder after Trost. The astronomer's precise, handsome face, with the familiar horn-rimmed glasses, seemed incongruous above the garments of rough khaki, against the alien background of an unfamiliar, desolate world. Without speaking the two men started in the direction of the city they had seen from the air.

The desert was not all sand. Grotto-like rock formations, eroded by cone of wind, ground and chilled by sand-grains, were all around them. Water apparently had played little part in shaping Mars—at least, not for many centuries. The air was curiously dry, and more than once the two drank from the canteens they had brought along.

They were crossing a barren, reddish waste when abruptly Shawn gripped Trost's arm, halted him.

"Hold on, Pete. There's something—"

"Eh!" Trost peered through his glasses. "Good Lord!"

To their ears came a harsh, very loud

scratching sound, like coarse sandpaper being rubbed together, and it seemed to come from underground. The sands heaved in turmoil, and thrusting up from the depths came a bristling, rounded surface.

At first Shawn scarcely realized the incredible size of the thing. It was huge as an elephant, rising inexorably out of the ground, and in a moment he saw the entire frightful shape. Only an alien age on a retting world could have spawned such a horror.

For it was a worm-thing, a monster with a coiling, sinuous body as thick and round as a barrel, dirty gray in color, and covered with thick bristling bunches of coarse black hair. The head was heavily furred, and it had no features, save for a gaping round aperture with a sharp, horny rim, large enough to swallow a man at a gulp.

Shawn's throat was dry, he stood unmoving as the monster glided forward. Trost croaked something, and the sound broke the spell that held Shawn. He flung up his rifle—a powerful magazine repeater—and squeezed the trigger, bracing himself against the recoil.

The bullet crashed into the monster's hide, opening a gaping, hideous wound from which a burst of yellowish ichor poured. But the worm-thing only came forward more swiftly, in silence save for the harsh rasping.

Shawn leaped aside, trying to see the creature's eyes. Apparently it had none, hunting by scent or by vibration. A wall of pulsing, bristle-haired flesh went past him, not a foot distant from the muzzle of his gun as he thrust it forward and fired again. The sound of a shot told Shawn that Trost was also trying to kill the horror.

IT coiled and turned swiftly, came pouring over the sands with incredible speed. The gaping, horn-rimmed beak bore down on Shawn. Sick fear dragged at his stomach. He fired point-blank down the creature's throat and sprang away just in time, feeling a sickening blow against his leg that sent him sprawling. Frantically he rolled over and over, leaping erect to face the worm.

But the monster was writhing in thrashing agony, all its hideous body knotting and twisting, a shrill knife-edged hiss blasting from its beak. Trost

was beckoning near by, and Shawn hastily ran toward the astronomer.

"Come on, Terry! We'd better scam!" Frost blinked through the dirt that entered his glasses, still perched precariously on his nose.

Shawn nodded, and together they circled the valley that the thrashings of the monster had hollowed out.

"Did you hear a shot a while ago, while we were shooting at that thing?" Frost asked. "I had a hunch it came from the Eagle, but it might have come from your gun."

"I heard a shot," Shawn said. "I thought you fired it."

"No. My rifle jammed. Do you suppose—"

They stared at each other. Shawn said, "It may have meant nothing."

"Maybe. But we'd better get back to the Eagle. It won't pay to take any chances."

Shawn nodded. They began to retrace their steps, giving the place of the worm-thing a wide berth. The dry air of Mars parched their throats, made the baked, hot landscape swing dizzily about them. They dared not travel too fast; the lack of sufficient oxygen would have been a serious, perhaps a deadly, handicap. So it was some time before they reached the spaceship.

The rope ladder still dangled from the open port. Shawn shouted as they came to it.

"Sam! Hello, there!"

Dead silence answered. Shawn glanced around, stiffened as he saw footmarks on the dry ground. Silently he pointed them out to Frost.

The astronomer nodded, glanced up inquiringly at the porthole. "What d'you think, Terry?"

"Stay down here. Keep me covered," Shawn whispered, and went up the rope ladder, an automatic in his hand. He reached the space lock, peered in. Nothing. With a wave at Frost he climbed aboard and opened the inner door.

Simultaneously a flash of steel gleamed; something moved toward his throat; a corker-twisted swordblade, wielded by a half-naked, brawny giant whose face, Shawn saw with a shock of surprise, was a white, passionless skull. Instinct saved Shawn—that, and the fact that he had been expecting an attack. He flung himself aside, felt his shirt rip as the

point tore through it. Pain stung his side.

Before his attacker could recover, Shawn fired. With a harsh scream of agony the man stumbled and went down, clawing at his chest where a red stream spouted forth. Shawn had no time for him; a gaunt, broad-shouldered warrior, with the same hideous skull face, was swinging his sword. He flung it with deadly accuracy.

Shawn ducked, heard the steel clack against the wall. Before he could fire the man was upon him, great hands digging into the Earthman's throat.

The impetus of his body sent Shawn crashing back. His head slammed against metal, and suddenly he went sick and dizzy. Choking for breath, slowing vainly at the frightful face looming above him, he realized that he had dropped his automatic.

His muscles felt weak as water. He tried to thrust at the killer's eyes, but the man rolled his head aside, shouting laughter. A black pit was opening beneath Shawn; the skull-face of the Martian was dwindling, growing smaller and smaller. . . .

A gun bellowed; the grinding fingers in Shawn's throat relaxed. The warm stickiness of blood was hot on his cheek. Fighting back his dizziness, he staggered up, freeing himself from the Martian's dying grip.

TROST stood nearby, smiling coldly. In an automatic smoking in his hand. "Any more of 'em, d'you think, Terry?" he asked.

Breathing in great gasps, Shawn shook his head. "Damn. Maybe—"

"No!"

Frost whirled, his gun thrusting forward. The Martian Shawn had shot through the chest was propped half upright against the inner door of the space-lock. The skull-face stared blindly.

"No—more of us!" the man gasped. "Doom curse you! We captured the others—as easily—we thought—"

Shawn bent over the dying man. "Where are they?"

"In Kather—by now."

"The city near here?"

The Martian nodded, thrust up a shrieking hand at Shawn—and died. His body tumbled limply forward.

"Terry," Frost said. "He wasn't

speaking English, was he?"

The glances of the two men looked. Shawn nodded slowly. "You had the same idea, eh? We didn't really hear that guy. It sounded inside my brain, somehow—"

"Thought transference," Trost finished. "That may help—our being able to understand them."

"Probably they can understand us, too." Shawn bent, fumbled at the pale skull of one of the dead Martians. It came away in his hand. "Mask. I thought so. That'll help. Pete, we'll change clothes with 'em. If we can get into the city without exciting suspicion, we may be able to find out what's happened to Hefley and the others."

Trost was already stripping, and Shawn followed his example. They donned flexible greenish kidies of some leathery hide, adjusted the strange cork-screw-bladed swords at their sides.

"I think I'll carry my mask for a while," Trost said, cying with distaste the blood that smeared it. He wiped it away as well as he could.

"Wonder if we dare take a gun," Shawn ruminated. "No place to put it, though. Damn!" He compromised by strapping an automatic to his thigh beneath the skirt-like garment, and Trost did the same.

"Now for the city. What did he call it—Kathor? Come on, Pete."

Not even the angry light of a war, reddish sun could brighten the aben gloom of Kathor's towers and minarets, rising sheer from the pathless wilderness. Shawn expected trouble at the gate he could see ahead, but there was surprisingly little difficulty about entering the city. He could not help wondering whether it might not be much harder to get out.

Soldiers guarded the portal, but after a brief glance at the skull-masks of the two Earthmen they lowered their swords. As they went on Shawn whispered, "I've a hunch only big shots are permitted to wear these things. Priests, maybe."

"Do you notice how human they all look?" Trost whispered back. "It confirms the Arrhenius space theory—that the spores of life float from planet to planet. Probably the Martians evolved from the same original stock we did."

Men and women, scantily garbed, hurried through the streets; occasionally

armed men, manifestly soldiers, lounged past. Once Shawn saw a man with a skull-mask hurrying swiftly into a doorway. He touched Trost's arm.

"Come along. That guy may know something."

They followed the priest—for, as Shawn learned later, that was the status of those who wore the skull-mask—and found themselves in what seemed to be a tavern, filled with the stench of oil and liquors. A few stools were scattered about, and a dozen men stood here and there, drinking from wooden cups. The priest was nowhere in sight.

SHAWN found a seat in a corner, and Trost sank down beside him. Presently a fat, moon-faced man appeared and thrust wooden cups into their hands, hurrying away without a word. The jaws of the mask were hinged, Shawn found, and he sipped the liquor.

It was bitterly potent, unpleasant in taste. He held it to his lips for a moment, and then lowered the cup, his eyes searching for the priest who had entered the tavern. A curtained doorway in the far wall indicated a possible exit.

Abruptly he stiffened. From the street something was shambling in—a grotesque, furry caricature of mankind, a thing neither beast nor human, but partaking of the features of each. Large as a man, its brutal, apish face held a gleam of intelligence far above that of a brute. Its naked body was covered with white hair. Yellow fangs gleamed in a gaping mouth, and reddish little eyes searched the room, malevolent inquiry in their depths.

"Look out, Terry," Trost said softly. "I don't—"

The beast-man shamled forward, lowering white-furred brows over its small eyes. A deep growl rose in its throat.

Through the room a breath of fear whispered. Men paused, frozen, silently cying the monster. Now Shawn saw that in the doorway stood a skull-faced priest, and behind him a dozen armed guards. His hand crept down to the automatic strapped to his thigh.

Without warning the beast-man sprang, bellowing rage. The foul stench of its breath was blown into Shawn's face. Its long arms stretched out toward him, the taloned, anthropoid fingers flexing.

Even at that moment Shawn realized

that to use his gun would mean betrayal. Garbed as a Martian, he might bluff this out—but he dared not shoot the creature. He touched his sword hilt.

The beast-man's head swung from Shawn toward the group at the door, slowly, with meaning. The priest's thoughts were clear as though he had spoken.

"These are the men, Valang! Take them!"

The leader of the soldiers followed the beast-man to the table. Cold black eyes looked at Shawn from a bearded, scarred face.

"Give me your blade!"

Shawn concentrated his thoughts, threw a mental question at the Martian.

"Why? What have I done?"

"You—" The soldier's hand shot out; he ripped the mask from Shawn's face. That was enough. The Earthman whipped out his automatic. He fired it as the guardsman lunged forward.

The man's features exploded in red ruin. The priest at the door screamed orders. And the soldiers came forward roaring like a wolf-pack.

In those close quarters Shawn and Trost had no chance; they were hopelessly outnumbered. They went down firing vainly, overwhelmed by an avalanche of muscular flesh. Shawn felt the gun torn from his hand; he smashed out viciously, desperately, feeling flesh and bone grind beneath his fists. Then, suddenly, something crashed down on his head, and blackness took him.

CHAPTER IV

BLACK GOD OF KATHOR

SHAWN awoke with a splitting headache, and lay quietly for a while gathering his strength. Light beat through his closed eyelids. He opened them a mere slit.

He lay flat on his back in a small room roofed with stone. There were paintings on the ceiling, depictions of men and women struggling in the grip of fantastic torture-devices, Satanic instruments of which the Inquisition had never dreamed. Shawn turned his head.

A guard sat by the door, sword across his knees, eyeing him. Shawn catalogued

the man mentally—brawny, slow, stupid. Against the further wall lay a slender figure, Lorna Rand, her rounded breasts and the lithe curves of her young body revealed in utter nudity! She was apparently unconscious, her closed eyes veiled by the auburn tangle of her hair.

The guard was less stupid than Shawn had thought. He checked deep in his bull throat. "You needn't sham. I can see you're awake."

"Yeah!" Shawn said, getting painfully to his feet. He was getting used to the fantastic thought-language. "Then tell me why I'm here."

"Presently you'll be sacrificed to Droom." The guard made a queer quick gesture with his hand.

Shawn limped forward, staggered and almost fell. The soldier watched sharply as he supported himself against the wall. Shawn whispered, "I don't—"

Then he sprang.

He almost caught the guard unaware—but not quite. The man sprang erect, sword lifted. Shawn's blow glanced from a barrel chest, and the guard smashed the hilt of his sword on the Earthman's unprotected head.

It was stark, blinding agony. Shawn fought dimly, frantically, against the flood of weakness that surged up within him. Vaguely he was conscious of his desperate blows falling lightly on hard flesh . . . and flashes of light began to dance before his eyes. . . .

The soldier grunted in surprise. The sword-hilt ceased to pound Shawn's head, and the latter dropped to his knees, weak and dizzy. Snarling curses came to his ears. He looked up.

Lorna was on the guard's back, bare arms locked about the bull throat. The soldier had almost dislodged her when Shawn tore the sword from the huge hands and sent its point tearing into flesh. Blood spouted.

The guard's breath left his lungs in an explosive green. He looked at Shawn incomprehendingly. And he fell, as a tree falls, stiffly, heavily.

The girl was flung against the wall to collapse in a limp huddle. Shawn dropped the sword, bent beside the girl, lifting her easily in his arms. She was unconscious.

"Lorna!" Shawn's voice was unsteady. His gaze ran the length of her nude body, searching for wounds, but the

girl was apparently unharmed. Then Lorna's eyelids fluttered and opened; she stared at Shawn blankly. Fear sprang into her eyes, and was gone as swiftly.

"Terry! Oh, Terry—" White arms went around the man's neck; he felt the warm firmness of Lorna's breasts flattened against his chest. Abruptly Shawn's heart was hammering. The smooth skin of the girl's back was hot against his palms. He could feel her breath fluttering in his ear, and suddenly his blood was a roaring, pounding tumult in his veins.

Shawn bent his head, found Lorna's soft red lips. They were like white fires, burning away all sanity and all caution. And the girl responded, crushing herself against him, trembling a little. She gave a soft, low cry.

Shawn caught sight of the corpse on the floor. He forced himself to calm. "We've got to get out of here, Lorna!"

SHE wriggled free, a warm flush mantling her face and bosom as she glanced down at her nudity. Quickly Shawn stripped the kirtle from the dead guard and gave it to her. Lorna donned it swiftly.

"Where are the others?"

"I don't know," the girl said, her eyes wide. "These men came—after you left. To the Eagle. They pretended to be friendly, and then jumped us. Hooker managed to fire a shot before they knocked him out. They brought us here—brought me down to this cell, took my clothes away—" Lorna crossed her arms on her bosom, flushing again. Shawn found it difficult to look away, but nevertheless he went to the door, peered through the barred grill.

It was locked, but he caught sight of a red set in slots to make the door fast. Carefully Shawn lowered the guard's sword hilt-first through the bars. After a few abortive attempts he succeeded in opening the prison.

With Lorna at his side Shawn went out into a dimly-lit corridor cut out of solid rock. "Pleasant place," he granted. "One way's as good as another. Both lead down."

"They brought me here blindfolded," Lorna said. "But I managed to understand a little of what they said. There's something—they're all afraid of. Something they call Droom."

"Yeah!" Shawn chose a direction at random. As they walked Lorna went on.

"I had an idea it was their god, though they seemed to regard it as something living, right here in their temple. They talked about Droom, and about the Houses."

"What are they?"

"I'm not sure. I've an idea the Houses are bodies the god is supposed to enter."

The passage branched before them. One, the left fork, led down steeply into darkness. The other widened, after a few yards, into a high-roofed room, beyond which it ran on, angling upward. Shawn heard the girl catch her breath. The cavern-chamber had—a tenant!

It was not human. It was a terebological haroqun that had been spawned by no sane world, a wrinkled, leathery gigantic horror that made the hair rise on Shawn's neck. It lay prostrate, unmoving, dead.

Seven feet tall, it had the general form of a man, though the torso was unnaturally broad. There were three short, stumpy legs, ending in clawed hoofs, and a bifurcated appendage hung down like a tail from the back. Some monstrous power had wrought ghastly chaos in the thing's features; one of the heads was the size of a large melon, with an elongated muzzle and tusks that protruded like those of a bear. The other head was worse. It seemed boneless. Shawn made out a faceless, hideous snout, a single glazed eye, fringed by pinkish hairs, and a wrinkled patch of fungus-like stuff crowning the skull.

He fought down nausea. "Come on. If this is one of those Houses, we haven't much to fear. It can't hurt us. It's dead, Droom or not."

He stepped forward, Lorna at his heels. And, suddenly—stopped.

The vault had a curious echo. Muttering, whispering, the name of the god was flung back and forth by the dark walls.

"Droom . . . Droom . . ."

Lorna caught her breath. "Terry! We've—"

Was the chamber darker? It seemed as though shadows were filtering down through the air, dropping thickly and more thickly upon the loathsome body that lay prostrate. The flaming torchlight from flambeaux set in the walls seemed less distinct. Lorna's face seemed hidden behind a shadowy veil.

The name of Kather's god whispered thinly through the steadily increasing darkness.

"Dream . . . Dream . . ."

Shawn drew back against the wall, his palms sweating, wishing for his gun. He gripped the sword tightly. He felt the girl's half-nude body pressed against him.

AND the shadows were thick—thick! They clustered about the monstrous thing on the stones, hiding it beneath a dark blanket. Suddenly Shawn shuddered, conscious of an abnormal chill in the air.

"Ye gods!" he whispered—and his flesh went cold with dread. For this was no Earthly menace of flesh and blood that he faced. It was something beyond humanity—something so alien that the breath of its presence was like a wind blowing chill from the gulfs beyond the world.

And the shadows sank down, whispering. They seemed to merge with the body of the abnormality on the stones, to mingle with its flesh and to disappear within it. Somehow Shawn knew, with a dreadful certainty, that where there had been only two in the vault, there were now—three. And the third was not human.

Shawn lifted the sword tentatively, staring around. "Come on," he muttered. "We've wasted too much time. I'm not going to try steel against that thing if I can help it."

Hastily he turned to the passage, propelling Larna with an arm about her waist. Behind them the shadows whispered ominously, the shifting darkness rustling down through the dark air.

But Shawn did not wait. As he entered the passage he shot a quick glance behind him, and saw something that lent speed to his flight. The horror on the stones was no longer still and dead. Life had come to it, in a fashion hideous beyond all imagination, and it was writhing and struggling in the pangs of frightful birth. The mouth gaped; the malformed limbs shuddered and clawed out hungrily; light shone in the single glassed eye. In dreadful silence it dragged itself upright.

"Come on!" Shawn whispered urgently, and fled with Larna along the passage. Luckily it was straight, and even in the

darkness where no torches burned he encountered no obstacles. The warm fragrance of Larna was close to him; occasionally her bare shoulder brushed his arm. Her breath came in little gasps.

And now there came the sound which Shawn had been dreading—the noise of pursuit. A slow, ominous thudding, machine-like, that spoke of a thing that pursued inexorably, with muscles that Shawn knew would never tire. He gripped the hilt of his sword tighter.

Light began to filter into the passage from ahead. They came to a flight of spiral steps that wound up in dim gray twilight. Behind them the noise of the approaching monster was louder.

The girl's steps lagged.

"Come along," Shawn granted, half carrying her up the interminable stairway. Granite walls gave place to black marble, shot with sparkling veins of crimson fire. They came out suddenly on a balcony, unrailed, and empty space dropped sheer beneath them. It was a cul-de-sac.

They were perched high up on the wall of a great cavern, above which a black dome arched like an iron cape. In its center a crimson globe hung, glowing with angry scarlet fire, sending its sullen radiance into every corner of the huge temple. For this, Shawn knew somehow, was the Holy of Holies—the temple of Dream. On the stone flags far below him was mystery—and horror.

The marble floor was inlaid with a pattern of colors, blue and green and dull yellow, twisting and curving into an arabesque design which was oddly unpleasant to the eye. Rugs and cushions and tapestries, ornaments that might grace the palace of an emperor were scattered carelessly about the huge room. Wandering leisurely about were dozens of the hairy beast-men; and in the very center of the floor was the altar.

An altar of glass! A globe of transparent crystal, shot with a shimmering veil of color. There were flaming lights drifting about within the altar, and intricately twisted tubes and levers, and there was a gray and pulsating monotony whose wrinkled surface sent a little shrob of recognition into Shawn's mind. A brain—but not a human brain.

No human skull had ever contained that swollen, malformed thing whose slow, rhythmic movement made Shawn

feel a little sick. Lorna went white, gripped her companion's arm to steady herself.

There was no time for more; a scuffle came from behind them. The monster came charging up the stairs. The House of Doom was indeed alive—and revenging for its dark pleasure!

CHAPTER V

THE BRAIN

HUNGEY fangs gleamed redly in the dim light. The two heads bobbed unsteadily on their single neck, but the single eye watched Shawn unwinkingly. He swung his sword in a short arc, chopping at a claw-like talon that swept out at his throat.

And he missed. With unnecessary speed the claw dodged and ripped the skin of Shawn's chest; the Earthman countered desperately. His lashing back-stroke almost severed the monster's arm.

Abruptly he knew what to do. His blade drove out in a straight line, directly for the single eye that watched him with cold, inhuman intelligence. The pulpy head jerked aside, but not far enough. The sword-point sank into glistening flesh. As the creature reared back Shawn twisted the weapon viciously, mangleing the single eye into a blood mess. Now it was blind.

It leaped forward in deadly silence, limbs flailing, jaws agape. Before Shawn could spring aside it was upon him. He shuddered at the touch of chill, unclean flesh that seemed to writhe and twist beneath his grasping fingers. He felt himself flung back—

Faintly he heard Lorna cry out. She seized his arm, but too late. The monster went charging blindly over the brink of the platform and dragged both Shawn and the girl with it as it fell.

Red light flashed out blindingly. From the globe of the altar a crimson ray blazed up, a narrow beam of radiance that gripped Lorna and the man, held them unsupported in empty air. Unbelievably Shawn stared down at the mosaic floor far below, seeing it rising toward him very slowly, while a bloody blotch upon the stones told the fate of the monster. Swiftly understanding

came to him. He himself had invented anti-gravity—and this was similar. Scientifically logical—but strange beyond imagination!

The two drifted down toward the crystal altar-globe. The lights danced more quickly within it, red and blue and flaming orange.

The beast-men were returning, clustering close, watching with their malignant little eyes. Shawn felt cold stone beneath him. He found himself on the ground, Lorna beside him. The weird force which had gripped them had snapped out with the red ray and vanished.

He shot a quick glance around Brazen doors, ajar, were set in the farther wall. Not far away was the crushed, bloody body of the two-headed monster, the sword still protruding from its eyesocket.

The beast-men spring forward, their hairy arms twisting about his body. He fought furiously, hattering at the grinning devil-masks so close to his face. The creatures made no attempt to hurt him—they merely closed in, gripping his arms and legs till he stood motionless, helpless.

Lorna was also held captive, though it took only one beast-man to subdue her. Her ivory skin gleamed in strange contrast to the dirty coat of the creature.

Beside them, in the hollow altar, the wrinkled gray thing pulsed more quickly, the little lights winking and dancing and drifting in a fantastically beautiful pattern, unearthly, and somehow horribly alluring. Into Shawn's mind came a thought message, cold and distinct.

"You are not of Kathor. Why do you come here?"

Carefully, measuring each word, Shawn answered, "We come from Earth—the third planet. Our world has been destroyed—"

"World? There are no others than this. You say blasphemy!"

Shawn hesitated. "Who are you?"

THIS thought-message was confused, I jumbled. It became clear suddenly. "I am a god. Ages ago the scientists of this world took the brain of a beast-man, evolved it by long and painful experiments. It became superhuman. I am that brain. I rule Kathor."

The lights whirled in the globe. "You doubt my power. Then watch!"

A chorus of growls from the beast-men.

They drew back, revealing the broken body of the monster. And, suddenly, a shiver shook it.

By horror lanced through Shawn. Lorna cried out unbelievably. The thing was rising, shambling forward, a crushed, frightful thing all speckered and dark with fresh blood. One of its heads was a smashed ruin; the other lolled drunkenly on a broken neck.

It came forward to where Lorna stood in the grip of the beast-man. Its talons seized the girl, dragged her away. Shrieking hysterically, she was cradled in the monster's embrace.

"Taste of my power!" Droom's thought came. "The intelligence is not bound to the body. I have many bodies, and my life can enter any of them."

Cursing, Shawn strained against the paws that held him. The monster's talons ripped blindly at Lorna's body, tearing the kirtle away in rags. The girl fought frantically, vainly. The milky curves of her bosom, sweeping lines of white beauty, were splashed with blood from her captor's crushed flesh.

The beast-men surged forward, their eyes red with lust, intent on the girl's nakedness. A hoarse roar went up from them.

"So?" Droom's thought seemed malicious. "My children are displeased. They demand their usual sacrifice. Well—they shall have the girl."

As though at a command, the undead monster dropped limp and unmoving. The beast-men tore Lorna away, dragged her, with Shawn, through the bronze doors. Hot, angry light blazed into their eyes.

A scarlet, blazing globe hanging from the high ceiling illuminated the room in merciless detail. It was an amphitheatre, tiers of seats rising from a flat, sunken pit in the center. Below the seats, in the walls of the pit, were barred doors, and behind them men and women, captive, staring out with hopeless fear. Bars were set in sockets so that they could not be reached by the prisoners.

In one cell Shawn saw his companions—Hefley, Flynn, and Frost, ragged and disheveled. Somehow Frost had managed to retain his horn-rimmed glasses, incongruous on his pale, haggard face. He saw Shawn, shouted.

But the Earthman could not answer. The beast-men dragged him up into the

tiers, held him tightly. Others were busy in the pit, dragging forward a curious machine.

It was a globe, set on pivoted wheels, with chains and manacles dangling from it. Lorna was pulled forward, and a metal collar clamped about her neck. The beast-man retreated swiftly into the gallery.

And slowly the globe began to move. It rolled forward slowly, pulling the girl with it. A shock of horror raced through Shawn as he saw little heat-waves shuddering up from the sphere; the device was becoming hotter.

The girl stumbled, almost fell. The sphere wheeled, came at her, and she dodged just in time. Wavering unsteadily on its pivoted base, the thing swung and rolled more swiftly toward the wall. It struck with a crash, bounced back. Shawn saw the metal side of the pit glow briefly red.

GOOD God! If the machine touched Lorna—it would fry the flesh from her bones! Cursing, Shawn fought uselessly against the hairy arms that imprisoned him. Below him the nude girl fled and dodged, her breath coming in great gasps, her moulded bosom rising and falling.

The watchers thundered manic glee. They leaned forward, red eyes blazing, yellow fangs bared.

Lorna went down, rolled away just as the globe rushed past her, painting her pale skin with crimson radiance. She was pulled forward, her breath cut off by the metal collar. Somehow she managed to get to her feet, dodged and ran once more, sobbing, with the fiery juggernaut pursuing inexorably.

She was weakening steadily, Shawn realized. He stared around, searching for some weapon. Abruptly his eyes narrowed.

He had caught sight of a familiar object strapped to the barrel chest of a beast-man—an automatic! The creature might have been the one who had attacked them in the tavern, who had managed to capture one of the guns, treasuring it with the unintelligent greed of an ape. The beast-man was intent on the seductive spectacle before him, and the others, too, were glaring down at the fleeing, nude girl. Shawn's captors had relaxed their vigilance.

That was a mistake on their part. Shawn measured the distance to the creature who had the gun. A desperate plan came to him—and he acted.

He kicked up viciously at the groin of the beast-men on his right, and as the monster doubled out, screaming, he whirled to face his other captor. Fangs bared, the creature thrust its hideous head forward, its talons digging agonizingly into Shawn's arms. But the Earth-man had already put all his strength into a sledgehammer blow that crashed against the beast-man's jaw with a grinding crack of breaking bones.

The thing shrieked, let go of Shawn. The slow minds of the others had not yet reacted. They were turning to face him, staring. Shawn sprang forward.

He reached the creature who had the gun. The beast-man moved forward, huge arms outstretched. Shawn dived forward, let himself be gathered into a rib-cracking embrace. The breath shot out of his lungs. A nauseous mass of fur choked him.

Blindly he fumbled for the gun, felt its cold metal against his palm. He yanked it free, thrust the muzzle against the monster's side, squeezed the trigger. The automatic bellowed.

Simultaneously the great binding arms contracted, sending frightful pain lancing through Shawn's back. Then—they relaxed! They fell away, limp and flaccid, and the beast-man roared his death-cry, blood spouting from his throat.

Shawn was free. In the pit he could see Lorna stumbling, dodging, as the red-hot machine rolled in eccentric pursuit. But he dared not pause to rescue her. Not yet.

He raced toward the bronze doors. The beast-men had not expected this; they were massing at the other side of the amphitheatre, before a closed gateway. A few of them barred Shawn's path, but he managed to dodge their lumbering attack.

Then he was in the temple, empty save for the altar and its dreadful tenant. As Shawn raced forward he felt a blast of power rush out to meet him, the mighty thoughts of Droom tearing at his brain. Blazing agony blinded him.

A thousand daggers of steel seemed to be plucking, tearing, wrenching at his head, pulling it apart bit by bit. The flames within the altar were blinding.

Staggering, he kept on, hearing the bellowing of the beast-men growing louder behind him. The sphere was a dozen feet away—

A taloned paw gripped his shoulder. He hurled himself forward, sick and blind with agony, felt himself crash down on the stones. A heavy body fell atop him.

Shawn thrust the gun forward, squeezed the trigger again and again. Something shattered; tinkling bells rang in a sudden outburst, and drowning them out was a high, sickening shrilling that faded and died. . . .

A hoarse roar sounded in Shawn's ears. The beast-man pinning him down sprang up, shouting. Throughout the temple the cries died into a horrified, deadly silence.

Shawn dragged himself up. The altar was a jagged wreck; the flaming lights were gone; sticky pale fluid ran trickling across the floor. The brain that was Droom was a mangled, hunched thing, no longer pulsing, no longer—alive!

CHAPTER VI

TITAN

FOR a moment the paralyzed bush bled; then it broke and the beast-men stampeded in mad fear, pouring in a great rush back into the amphitheatre, through it, and out between metal gates now flung ajar. Hastily Shawn followed in their track.

The blazing machine to which Lorna was chained was no longer moving; its motive power seemed to have died with Droom. The girl lay unconscious on the stones. Shawn freed her from the collar, and then released his companions from their cell.

He had foreseen difficulty in escaping from the city, but a revolution was in progress, they discovered on leaving the temple. The priests had apparently bled the people in a grip of fear, under the rule of Droom, and now the people had revolted. Even the soldiers joined in mercilessly slaughtering priests and beast-men. Carrying Lorna, the Earth-men picked their way furtively by alleyways, dimly lit by Phobos and Deimos, the two moons, till at last they passed

safely through the gate and saw the desolate, reddish wastes before them.

Trost had learned some important facts during his captivity. The golden fleet had not, apparently, come from Mars. In fact, he said, the priests had been discussing the destruction of several of their cities by yellow spaceships that dropped down from the void to bring death and ruin to Mars.

"That means we'll have to look further," Shawn granted as they clambered aboard the *Eagle*. "You said Saturn and Mars were the logical places, didn't you, Sam?"

"Yeah," Hefley nodded. "One of Saturn's moons, I imagine. Titan's the best bet, though it'll take quite a while."

"Not so long. We can't equal the speed of the golden ships, but there's plenty of power in anti-gravity. And now that the compensators are adjusted we won't have to worry about acceleration."

But the distance they had to travel was nearly seven hundred and fifty million miles. Despite the incredible velocity of the *Eagle*, it was a week before the ringed splendor of immense Saturn loomed before them—Saturn, with its nine moons. Shawn agreed with Hefley that Titan was the obvious choice, and so he sent the spaceship hurtling through the atmosphere, dropping lower and lower over a densely-forested region.

"Punny how white the forest is," Trost commented, polishing his glasses. "Distance from the sun, I suppose. Lack of solar radiation—no chlorophyll to make the leaves green. No signs of life."

"Of human life," Shawn amended. "Wait a minute! I think—"

He brought the *Eagle* curving down in a spiral. On a broad, rocky expanse something artificial was certainly constructed, a towering cube of stone forty feet high. Shawn dropped the spaceship gently near it.

"Looks like a house," he commented. "It may be empty, though. I don't see anything alive."

"I doubt if the golden fleet came from here," Hefley said.

"We might pick up a clue. There may be some way of finding out what we want to know. If there's intelligent life in that stone block."

Lorna, trim and boyish in shirt and slacks, said, "Find out if the air's okay.

I'm sick of this artificial stuff."

"It's breathable," Trost told her. "The plant-life takes care of that."

Leaving Trost and Hefley to man the *Eagle*, Shawn and Hooker Flynn descended the rope ladder. Before they had gone a hundred yards Lorna joined them.

"Wanted to stretch my legs," she chuckled in answer to Shawn's disapproving look.

The air was very cold, the Sun a dim red star in a purple, star-speckled sky. The heat emitted by the immense globe of Saturn was small. Warily the three went toward the stone block, noticing holes—apparently doorways—at its base.

It was strangely silent. No one spoke until Lorna touched Shawn's arm, said quickly, "Wait a minute. I hear something—"

They paused. For a long moment there was no sound; then a faint stir of movement came from far away. Simultaneously a shout sounded from the *Eagle*.

"Terry! Look out!"

Trost's voice! Shawn whirled, saw a horde of fantastic creatures pouring from the forest, racing forward swiftly. Dinosaurs, he thought—but curiously different from the great reptiles that had once existed in Earth's Mesozoic swamps. These were small, half as tall as a man, with blunt noses, long-fingered hands that seemed almost human, and tails that were atrophied and vestigial. They ran instead of hopping. Their skins were pale, whitish like the forest.

There were hundreds of them. Shawn said, "Back to the ship. Quick!" He drew his automatic, hurried forward, his companions beside him.

But he was too late. The dinosaurs closed in, harring them from the ship. They surged up like a wave.

The Earthmen had no chance. They emptied their guns, killing many, but within minutes they were overwhelmed. The dinosaurs' cold hands gripped them, lifted them. The three were carried toward the stone block.

As they reached it there was an interruption. A strident burst of gunfire staggered out. Trost and Hefley had sallied from the ship, armed with sub-machine guns, and they were blasting their way through the hordes of dino-

sure, shouting reassurance to their companions.

The group carrying Shawn were in the lead, and they increased their pace, scurrying into one of the black holes in the stone cube. Flynn, a few feet behind him, was galvanized into activity. His fists flailed; he kicked and writhed furiously.

The hubbly of the sub-machine guns momentarily daunted the dinosaurs. They gave way, fear sweeping them. Hooker Flynn tore free, rushed toward Frost and Hefley. And Lorna, too, managed to tear herself away from her captors.

Then the dinosaurs rallied. They surged forward like a great wave, and the three Earthmen were buried beneath a mound of reptilian flesh. Lorna was unharmed; she stood hesitating, and then turned toward the ship as several of the dinosaurs ran toward her. But her path was blocked. Dozens of the creatures were advancing now, closing in in a semi-circle.

Blinded she turned and fled, her flesh shrinking with cold fear of the monsters. And, hissing shrilly, they leaped forward on her trail, striving to intercept her. But she reached the forest before them.

It was icy there, the ground carpeted with dead, rotting vegetation, the interlacing leaves forming a dim, whitish ceiling high above. She ran in a clear, shadowless gloom, hearing behind her the rapid padding footsteps of the dinosaurs.

She tried to double on her tracks, but dared not continue, for several of the creatures, guessing her intention, angled across to intercept her. The girl was already gasping for breath, her clothing soaked with perspiration. But the dinosaurs ran without effect, coursing her like wolves.

The thought stirred a chord of memory in Lorna's mind, recalling a trick she had once read. Would it work with these creatures—or were they too intelligent to be duped? Her heart pounded furiously; her throat was one raw blaze of fire. Snatching a quick glance behind her, she saw the leader of the dinosaurs terrifyingly close, cold eyes intent upon her, jaws agape.

SWIFTLY the girl ripped open her shirt, slipped it off, still running, let it fall to the ground. She dared a quick

look, and exultation flamed within her. The monsters were pausing to sniff at the discarded garment, fingering it with their anthropoid hands. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Lorna swerved in a curve that would take her back to the Eagle.

But the dinosaurs came after her again, hissing. Lorna slipped out of her slacks, let them fall from rounded hips, down the slim length of her legs. Another few yards gained while the dinosaurs examined the garment—

Lorna's shoes were already gone; save for a lacy brassiere and step-ins she was nude. She was fumbling blindly at the fastenings of her remaining garments when something sprang out from behind a tree; she cannoned into it, felt cold flesh against her body. She was flung back, sent sprawling to the ground. For the first time she saw the nature of this being.

A man, short, naked save for a breechcloth, with his body oddly mottled with darker patches. His grayish skin had a curiously leathery texture. His head was—not human?

The flattened skull, the broad, loose-lipped mouth, the shallow, dull eyes, all combined to send a ripple of fear down Lorna's spine. For the man had the taint of the serpent unmistakably upon him.

The dinosaurs came in view, only five of them now, and they paused and circled, wary and alert. The snake-man snarled, and Lorna saw two gleaming, needle-like fangs bared. One of the dinosaurs leaped forward.

The snake-man sprang; the two bodies collided in midair. Shining white fangs dug into the dinosaur's flesh. And, hissing, the creature flung up its hideous head, dropped instantly to writhe and twist in convulsions upon the rotting vegetation.

As though at a signal the other reptiles reeled away.

The snake-man turned to Lorna. Fear and amazement had held her motionless, but now she sprang to her feet, throat tight with dread. Before she had covered a dozen paces the snake-man caught her.

She fought against his grip, but a cold, deadly repulsion weakened her. The being laughed down at her, and, as the girl's blows hammered against his chest,

he suddenly snarled, lowering his fangs menacingly. Lorna panted, her eyes wide—and once more the snake-man laughed.

Swinging her lightly under his arm, he hurried into the depths of the dark forest.

CHAPTER VII

THE SILENT WORLD

WHEN Shawn was carried into the cube of the dinosaurs he was unconscious, or nearly so. He had felt a hitting pain in his shoulder, and directly afterward he fell into a light coma, paralyzed, only vaguely comprehending what was happening. So he was able to make no resistance as he was dragged underground, down a slanting corridor scarcely four feet high, in which he could not have stood erect but where the dinosaurs moved with ease.

For a long time, Shawn thought, he was carried thus. Gradually the power of the drug was wearing off, but he held himself motionless, waiting till he had regained his strength. After a long time they came to a blank wall; one of the dinosaurs furnished with a slender hand at the stones. They slid away, revealing a brightly-lit expanse beyond.

Shawn had the impression that the dinosaurs were afraid. They shrilled softly, peering forward, and at last continued very slowly, carrying the Earthman into a passage, twenty feet high and nearly as wide, lit with cold radiance that came from a tube set in the roof and running the length of the corridor. Shawn stared up. It wasn't a tube; it seemed to be a bar of metal, glowing with a bright, chill light. The passage stretched to right and left, curving gently, and directly across was another tunnel mouth at right angles to the one where the dinosaurs were huddled about him. The gap in the wall had closed, he saw; there was no trace of it.

The air was no longer cold; it was stuffy and humid. Abruptly a flicker of movement appeared far down the corridor.

Instantly the dinosaurs were in turmoil. They dropped Shawn and scur-

ried about purposelessly, hissing. Then, in a group, they sprang back to the wall. Again the opening appeared in it. They fled through, and once more the smooth stone surface appeared unbroken.

Shawn's paralysis had worn off, he realized. Quickly he got to his feet, hurried into the tunnel mouth a few feet away. Crouching in its shadow, he waited as the thing that had frightened the dinosaurs approached.

It came swiftly—and horrified unbelief struck through Shawn. It was a snake—but a snake incredibly huge, its thick body as large as a barrel, and, he guessed, almost fifty feet long! Nor was that all.

There were certain curious features about its head, hastily glimpsed as it moved past. In the flashing glimpse Shawn caught he saw that the thing's head was an irregular spheroid, instead of being flat and wedge-shaped, and in its contour there was a nauseating resemblance to a human face. The mouth was small and scarcely visible, but from the great eyes shone a light of unmistakable intelligence. Girdling the reptile's neck was a fringe of pulpy, dead-white tentacles, writhing as though with a sentient life of their own.

The snake moved past and was gone in a flash, leaving Shawn trembling. The reptile was—tainted!—with humanity! Its head had been distinctly anthropoid in outline.

The clanging, discordant note of a gong sounded in the distance. It rang out three times and died away into silence, and the hot, stagnant air seemed to press closer in the dead stillness. Frowning, Shawn went into the corridor along which the reptile had passed and peered after it. Nothing stirred, and after a moment he set out in the direction from which the snake had come.

The corridor was level and straight, and occasionally Shawn passed the mouths of other brightly lit tunnels. He quickened his pace. The clanging came again, but this time it sounded five times before it died away. As it faded Shawn saw a movement far ahead of him in the corridor, and paused, hesitating. Peering under his hand, he made out two great snakes gliding rapidly toward him, slithering.

He looked around quickly.

SUDDENLY he remembered passing the mouth of a side tunnel a hundred yards back. He spun about and went racing along the corridor, flinging himself into its sanctuary. Some premonition of danger made him hurry along the passage instead of remaining near its entrance.

That premonition saved him. Behind him came a harsh rustling, rapidly growing louder. The reptiles had entered this passage.

Shawn fled, sweating. If they had not glimpsed him before, his sudden movement attracted their attention, for he heard a curious whistling cry from behind him, and saw a needle-thin pencil of light dart past his head. There was an angry crackle as it fell on the rock wall, and as he raced past Shawn saw that the rock was beginning to glow redly, and a wave of heat followed out at him. His mouth stretched in a wry grin, Shawn redoubled his efforts; there was a sharp pain in his chest but he dared not slacken his pace.

Momentarily he expected to feel burning agony in his back, but the attack did not come. He risked a backward glance. The white ray was no longer visible, but the snakes were still coming purposefully behind him, their great heads erect and watchful.

There was a sharp turn in the passage, and Shawn flung himself around it. He was in a cavern—a roofless cavern.

If there was a roof, it was too high for Shawn to discover. It was like standing at the bottom of a deep shaft, staring up at a haze of dim light overhead.

A sound behind him spurred him to action. He sprang over a foot-wide gulf that blocked his path, running to left and right girdling the cavern, and made for a huge structure that stood in the center of the floor. It was a machine of some nature, but more complicated than any Shawn had ever seen before. Pistons, geared wheels, enigmatic tubes and cables and great transformers made the thing a giant metal monster, crowned with a silvery sphere which illuminated the cavern. But within the recesses and shadows of the machine was room for a dozen men to hide.

Shawn darted behind a great block of crystal and burrowed his way into the interior of the construction. He found a dusty hiding-place between two thick

supporting posts.

Peering out through a screen of cables, he made out the forms of his pursuers emerging from the passage. As he watched they came rippling across the cavern floor toward him, and he shrank back, his hand going instinctively toward a gun that was not in his holster. But they had not seen him.

They paused and coiled a few yards from the machine, so that Shawn could examine them closely. Staring from his vantage point, he was struck again with their terrifying likeness to mankind.

Their shapes were those of reptiles, but their heads were irregular spheres, with magnificent brain-cases. From a side view their heads were not greatly dissimilar to man's, save for the absence of the nose. Shawn soon discovered the purpose of the rope-like appendages fringing the necks of the creatures, for a tentacle of the nearest was coiled about a silvery sphere as large as a coconut. The globe was raised in the direction of the machine, and a crimson, pencil-thin ray shot from it.

Involuntarily Shawn flinched, but the ray was not directed at him. He heard a soft clicking, and above him a great caged wheel began to revolve swiftly; with a multitude of gentle whisperings and clickings the machine began to operate.

Shawn felt a momentary fear that he would be crushed by the plunging, revolving parts; but his hiding-place had been well chosen. He was safe, as long as he did not venture within reach of a rod as thick as his body which rose and sank a foot away.

Assured of his temporary safety, Shawn peered out again. The walls of the cavern were sinking from view, and the floor on which he crouched was rising up into the great shaft. He was being lifted swiftly toward the cryptic glow overhead, for apparently this platform, the entire floor of the shaft, was nothing more than a huge elevator.

AS the platform rose the white-lit mouths of caverns were briefly visible, as they dropped into view and fell from sight beneath the floor level. Within these half-glimpsed caves Shawn caught glimpses of strange and monstrous creations of an alien world.

In one cave, as though on the stage of

some vast theatre, he saw long tiers of metallic racks stretching into the distance, racks which held flattened gray ovoids that were like greatly magnified snake eggs. In another cave he saw a mass of unfamiliar machinery, great throbbing engines of glowing crystal and shining metal. The speed of the platform accelerated as it swept upward, so that presently Shawn caught no more than flashing glances of inexplicable things—a shapeless black mound crowned by a glowing blue flame; a gray lit cavern where dozens of the great snakes swarmed about a huge, red-dripping carcass, larger than the largest elephant; a cavern in which there stood what Shawn thought to be the image of a golden snake, fifty feet high from its lowest coils to its erect, watchful head. Then, without warning, the platform slowed its swift rise and came to a silent stop.

An empty passageway opened in the wall of the shaft. Shawn, watching, saw the two snakes uncoil and glide swiftly across the floor to the mouth of the cave. They entered it, and rippled from sight around a bend.

Shawn frowned. He dared not try to extricate himself yet, for the shining piston still rose and sank dangerously near his head, and all about him the machine was throbbing and moving. And suddenly the platform began to rise again.

It went up smoothly for perhaps two hundred feet and then stopped. The machinery slowed down; the piston fell once or twice and then came to a halt. Shawn stared out at what lay before him.

Freedom! Through a narrow slit in the wall Shawn saw the pale glow of Saturn, and caught a glimpse of whitish vegetation. Through the gap came a little breeze, cold and refreshing. Shawn began to edge past the motionless piston.

He extricated himself from the machine at last and hurried across to the opening. The possibility of the platform's moving again made him quicken his pace—and Shawn's leg went down into the foot-wide gulf where the flooring ceded. He fell forward on hands and knees; but the sudden fall saved his life.

White-hot agony lanced along the Earthman's back. Shawn saw from the corner of his eye a white ray of light

that vanished abruptly; then the platform was sinking beneath him back into the depths—faster, ever more swiftly!

He flung himself forward, scrambled frantically for footing, half his body hanging above emptiness. But Shawn's whispered curses served him now, and presently he lay on the floor of the corridor, his heart throbbing. As a mud-floored clanging floated up from the shaft behind him, he scrambled up and ran toward the open air.

Across the mouth of the passage was a shimmering play of colors, half invisible in the light of Saturn. Shawn extended a tentative hand, and, as nothing happened, stepped through the rainbow veil, felt the soft warmth of soil beneath his feet. He stared around.

He had emerged from a low, grayish hut of metal, its color blending with the ground to make an excellent camouflage. The forest mounted before him, a great wall hemming him in.

Where was the Eagle? Shawn didn't know; at random he chose a direction and started into the forest. He searched his pockets, hoping to find a compass, though he knew it was no use. Cigarettes, matches, some food tablets—but nothing that would aid him now.

A RUSTLE in the dead leaves caught his attention. Three figures came from the gloom—strange, fantastic figures. Serpent-men! Similar to the one Lorna had encountered, gray skinned, snake-headed, hideous. Repugnance shook Shawn, and he remained unmoving only with an effort.

As they approached the Earthman held up his hand palm forward in the ancient peace-gesture. Startled by the sudden movement, two of the creatures sprang back and darted aside, swift as ferrets, into the forest. The remaining one stared wordlessly.

"Hello," Shawn said, wondering how he could make himself understood. The snake-man gabbled a few hissing words.

Shawn nodded, pointed at the sky. The other hesitated, and then sharply turned, beckoning. He looked back to see whether Shawn was following.

"Night as well," the Earthman shrugged. "He knows where he's going, and I don't." A glance around showed that the other snake-men had closed in behind him. This was not reassuring, but

Shawn fought down his uneasiness.

Once a dinosaur ran into view, but after a sharp glance it fled hastily. The walk was not a long one—scarcely more than a mile—and at last Shawn came into a great clearing. A cluster of huts, built and thatched with dry leaves, huddled in the center. Around it were cultivated fields, ashy-gray in color, studded with whitish, straw-like vegetation.

Dozens of the snake-people were grouped together, and Shawn was conducted toward them.

Something made Shawn look up. His eyes widened as he saw a shining sphere moving, far away, above the rampart of the pale forest—the Eagle! Apparently Hefley and the others had beaten back the dinosaurs, were searching for their companions. Shawn looked around, trying to discover a means of signaling his friends.

Strong hands shoved him into the midst of the group. A crudely built wooden chariot, built on runners like a sled, supported one of the snake-men, taller than the others, wearing a string of bright stones strung together in a necklace, his loincloth also sewed with the gems. Harnessed to the chariot was a curious beast, resembling one of the dinosaurs, but somewhat larger, and covered with gleaming scales.

On the ground, buckled in a frightened heap, was Lorna! Her undergarments had been brutally ripped away, and the avid eyes of the snake-men were intent on the naked beauty of her body. Above her stood one of the creatures, snarling and gesturing angrily.

The girl was his! His, by right of possession! But the snake-man in the chariot—apparently the ruler of the tribe, the chieftain—would not agree. He roared a peremptory command.

The other hesitated, drew back. Then he launched himself suddenly up, hands clawing, fangs bared, at the throat of his chief!

But the charioteer was ready. The two men grappled, swayed and stumbled to their knees. The steed, frightened, reared, uttering loud, coughing cries. It sprang away with a great leap, and the rotten harness that held it snapped. Shouts went up from the mob; some tried to recapture the beast, but it evaded them, went stampeding to the forest, where it vanished.

Shawn's eyes went back to the chariot. The chieftain was rising from the body of his attacker, and the latter was twitching and jerking convulsively, blood dripping from a wound in the shoulder. The charioteer dismounted, made a quick gesture. Others swiftly picked up the body of the dying snake-man and bore it away.

And now the chieftain turned toward Shawn. Cold, glittering eyes appraised the Earthman with passionless speculation. He looked at Shawn's captor, asked a question.

The other's answer seemed to satisfy him. He glanced down at the torn harness of the chariot, looked at the prostrate girl. At his command cold, strong hands gripped Lorna's arms, pulled her erect. She was dragged forward.

And Shawn, too, felt himself prisoned by the snake-men, pulled to the chariot.

Soon he found himself standing, arms bound behind him, feet hobbled by a foot-long cord. Beside him stood Lorna. Five ropes cut into their shoulders and chests, ropes that were attached to the chariot.

Slaves of the snake-men!

CHAPTER VIII

PANES OF DEATH

LORNA made a futile attempt to hide her slim nudity; she crouched down, trembling, in a huddled heap, the cords digging painfully into her flesh. One of the snake-men leaped forward, dragged the girl erect. His icy hand touched her naked breast in a lascivious caress. Lorna screamed, shrinking back toward Shawn.

The man's fist drove out viciously, but the snake-man dodged nimbly. From the chieftain came an angry roar. A whip tore a red furrow in Shawn's back.

Snarling a curse, he whirled, fists clenched. The demon-mask of the chieftain loomed at him from the chariot. The whip swung again, and a cry came from Lorna.

The sound brought sanity to Shawn. Battle against this horde would mean death, he knew—and he could not leave Lorna unprotected here. He had a plan, but it could not be carried out yet. Better to pretend obedience—

He turned, leaned forward, pulling at the ropes that bound him. They cut into his shoulders and chest, but the chariot moved forward slowly on its runners.

"Don't try to pull," Shawn told the girl. "Just keep step with me."

But the chieftain saw through the subterfuge. Each time Lorna lagged the whip slashed down on her back, and the girl's naked body was soon streaming with perspiration as she pulled at her harness. Shawn cursed, but he dared not retaliate. Not yet—not till he saw the *Eagle*.

Across the clearing and back again they pulled the chariot, gasping and sweating with exertion. Apparently this was some religious ceremony, perhaps connected with the planting of crops, for in their wake the snake-men followed, turning the soil with shovels and scattering seeds.

Again the two strained at the harness. Shawn had made a decision; he would attempt escape, before both he and Lorna had been driven to pain-racked exhaustion. His bound hands were behind his back, but, straining, he managed to twist them around until his fingers could be inserted in his trousers pocket. The matches were there.

From the chieftain came a cry. Hastily Shawn slipped open the folder, awkwardly tore out a match and scratched it alight. He threw it as far as he could.

The matted, dry stubble caught fire, as he had foreseen. A tongue of flame licked up hungrily. Whether the snake-people were familiar with fire Shawn didn't know, but judging from their appearance now they were not—or, at least, were very much afraid of it.

A chorus of gobbling, croaking cries went up as the blaze spread. The group hesitated—and whirled, racing toward their village of huts. The chieftain sprang down from his chariot, followed them, but more slowly.

Shawn lit another match, tried to burn the cord that bound his wrists. The material was highly inflammable. He felt a sharp surge of pain—and his hands were free. Quickly he ripped away the harness, tore the hobble from his legs.

The fire was dangerously close, sweeping across the dry grasses swiftly. Shawn freed the girl. They looked around, searching for escape.

"This fire—it may bring the *Eagle*," Shawn said. "A signal—"

Lorna nodded. "But we'd better get out of here. Quick!"

There was a gap in the wall of flame, and they raced toward it. Behind them came an angry shout. Glancing back, Shawn saw the chieftain in pursuit.

Lorna stumbled, went to her knees. The gap in the blaze was narrowing; Shawn caught her up, half lifted her forward. Gasping, choking with smoke, they rushed through the opening, the red ball of fire sweeping toward them.

"The forest!" Lorna choked. "It—the trees won't burn!"

From the village an outburst of shrieks came. The huts were afire, and the snake-people, trapped within them, were being roasted alive. Shawn could feel no pity for the monstrous beings.

THE two reached the forest's edge, sank down. But they were given no respite. A blackened, roaring thing broke through the flames, came at them, eyes ablaze. The chieftain—

"Look out, Terry!" The girl's voice was frightened. "If he bites you—"

Shawn knew too well the deadly venom of the snake-man's fangs. He pushed Lorna behind a pale tree-bale, braced himself, awaiting the onslaught.

The creature hesitated, eyeing him. Taking advantage of the respite, Shawn looked around for a weapon. A dozen feet away a curiously regular arrangement of leaves and branches on the ground drew his gaze. He made a quick spring, caught up a thick, heavy limb.

The ground crumbled beneath his feet. He threw himself back, realizing that he had almost fallen into a pit, dug, perhaps, by the snake-people to trap game. Shawn went down flat on his back, and saw the chieftain charging forward, fangs bared.

The Earthman still gripped the branch, and he swung it up—and felt his fingers sink into powdery pulp. The limb was a mere shell, rotten, useless. The dust sifted into his eyes, almost blinding him. Through a haze he saw the snake-man leaping at his throat.

Without conscious thought Shawn acted. He drew his legs up and back, kicked out with all his strength in a piston drive that smashed into the creature's middle. The snake-man was hurled

back, sent flying against the bole of a tree. But he was up again immediately.

So was Shawn. From the corner of his eye the Earthmen caught sight of a gleaming, huge sphere dropping toward the clearing—the *Eagle*, summoned by the signal flames. He didn't wait for the snake-man's charge this time. Instead, he stepped forward, left shoulder lifted, right hand low.

As the creature came at him again Shawn swung a fast, hard punch that cracked against cold flesh with a gratifying sound. The snake-man wasn't used to this sort of battling. He depended on his poison fangs—they failed him now.

For his neck was broken, snapped cleanly under the force of Shawn's mule-kick punch. He went back again to collapse in a writhing, kicking huddle on the ground, and this time he did not rise. Gradually his squirmings ceased.

Shawn looked for Lorna. She stood near by, a heavy rock in her hand, her nude body as ivory statue in the shadowless light.

Swiftly she ran to the man. Her arms went about his neck. "Terry!" she whispered, her breath soft on his cheek. "I was afraid—"

She clung closer, her breasts flattened against his chest. Breathing hoarsely, Shawn held the girl, his mouth avid on hers. Beneath his hands he could feel the satiny smoothness of her skin, the lyric curve of her hips. His throat felt dust-filled; his heart was hammering against his ribs.

"Lorna—"

Shawn's arms tightened spasmodically about her supple form. Between her open lips he could feel the moist, hot inferno of her breath. The girl's hands strayed to Shawn's hair, drawing him closer . . .

She drew back at last, smiling shakily. As Shawn moved forward Lorna stepped him with a gesture.

"The *Eagle*. It's landed."

The great spaceship had grounded in the clearing, and running toward the two were Trout, Hefley, and Hooker Flynn, their faces unshaved and anxious.

"Terry!" Hefley hailed. "You okay? Lorna!"

"We're safe," Shawn shouted and moved forward, the girl at his side. Then he stopped, frozen. His hand went out in a quick gesture.

"Look out! Get back—"

FROM the cloudless purple sky roared a torpedo-shaped ship, Sun-golden, the atmosphere screaming in its wake. Scarcely slackening its speed, it dropped down toward the clearing. A few feet above the ground it jerked to a halt, dropped again with cushioned steadiness.

A porthole gaped in its side. From the golden ship poured—monsters! Things that bore no slightest resemblance to mankind—creatures whose appearance sent a shudder through Shawn.

The craft had grounded between the two and their friends, so Shawn could not see what was happening on the other side of the golden ship. He gripped Lorna's arm, spun her around.

"We're unarmed—we'll have to hide. Hefley and the others may get back to the *Eagle*. Come on!"

They turned, sped back to the forest. Shawn was seeing in his mind's eye the things that had emerged from the golden ship.

Mounds of flesh, shapeless, transparent, sliding like jellyfish over the ground. He knew that many of them were racing after him, and the thought made him increase his speed. So he did not see the pit till it was too late.

His foot went down into emptiness. Clutching at thin air, Shawn toppled forward, went hurtling down, hearing above him the girl's scream. He struck with a sickening impact that knocked the breath from his body, and went spinning down into the deeper abyss of blind unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IX

STRANGE SOMNOMS

A FOUL, acrid odor brought Shawn to full realization of his surroundings. How long he had been out he did not know, but as he stumbled erect, fighting a dull ache in his head, he realized that he had fallen into the trap the snake-men had dug. Around him were chunks of putrefying flesh, vaguely luminous in the gloom. Saturn had fallen beneath the horizon. Shawn guessed, and this part of Titan was veiled by night.

The sides of the pit were not steep, and he managed to scramble up them.

Once he dislodged a stone and froze unmoving until the echoes of its fall had died away. No sound came from above.

At last he clambered over the edge. The forest was very dark, but a few feet away the clearing lay in dim starlit gloom. Two small moons high above gave some light, but not much. Some distance away a great black shadow told of the *Eagle's* whereabouts. The golden ship had gone.

Warily Shawn crossed the clearing till he stood beneath the spaceship. The rope ladder still dangled from the open port, and he climbed it slowly, alert for danger. But he entered the space lock and the control room safely.

There he paused, staring. Huddled in a shapeless mound in the center of the floor was a creature, five feet tall, that he recognized as one of the amoeba-like beings from the golden ship. One of the Aliens who had destroyed Earth!

Hot flame of anger mounted within Shawn, sending blood pounding to his temples. He made an involuntary step forward, fists clenched—and the Alien awoke.

It rose up into a tall spire, half seen in the dim bulk that lighted the control room, and Shawn saw within it a blackish, spherical blob from which tendrils coiled out in slender spider-webs through all that boneless, monstrous body. In deadly silence the thing swept forward.

Shawn gripped the first weapon that came to his hand—one of the swords they had captured on Mars. He lifted it from a stack of paraphernalia that littered a desk beside him and swung it aloft.

The Alien did not pause. Tentacles coiled out from its body, stretching toward Shawn as it advanced. The Earthman, even as he slashed down with the blade, wondered whether the monster was vulnerable—whether steel could damage its inhuman flesh.

The sword sank deep! It sliced into rubbery, transparent stuff, and a sudden retractive movement of the Alien almost wrenched the weapon from Shawn's hand. He wrenched the blade free just as the creature closed with him, rushing up and enfolding him like quicksand—living quicksand.

It was like being engulfed in concrete. Shawn could scarcely move; he felt icy, dark skin against his face, and abruptly his breath was cut off. He could not

breathe. Choking, staggering as he braced himself, legs wide apart, the Earthman wrenched free his sword-hand, sent the sharp blade tearing, rending, ripping at the flesh of the Alien.

The black blob seemed to explode like a bladder. Instantly the thing's grip relaxed; it fell away, dropped to the floor and huddled into a sphere. From the nucleus an inky cloud spread swiftly, turning all that glistening transparent body jet-black. It lay motionless—conquered, dead.

SHAWN let the sword fall, and dropped into a chair, breathing deeply. After a while he took a flask of brandy from a cupboard and gulped the hot, fiery liquor. Then, strengthened, he rolled the Alien—for the creature was too heavy to lift—through the space lock and porthole to drop to the ground.

He armed himself, and, sword in hand, searched the *Eagle*. It was empty, save for himself. Apparently the beings that had come in the golden ship had left only one of their number behind, perhaps to guard the *Eagle*, or to discover its mode of operation.

Where was Lorna and the others?

A heavy feeling of oppression settled down on him. He drank more brandy, shut the port hole and space lock, sat before the instrument board, pondering.

As he sat, an odd, inexplicable feeling began subtly to overwhelm him. He had been idly eyeing the bottle before him, and it seemed to be receding, sliding back. For a second Shawn had the fantastic impression that he stood outside his body, watching it impersonally. . . .

He fought it down. But when he tried to rise, his muscles refused to obey. The Earthman sat, paralyzed and silent, at the controls of the *Eagle*. . . .

Within his brain sounded a whisper. Thin, wordless, it came, very much like the telepathy of the Martians, Shawn thought. But the whisper evoked no images in his mind. Only it grew louder, peremptory—

Summoning!

Unmistakably—calling! Demanding—Demanding—what?

Shawn's hand moved. As though of its own volition, it went out to the instrument panel, touched a key. Yet Shawn knew that his own brain had willed it.

His brain, yes. But not his mind, not

his—self! Something, strange beyond all imagination, seemed to dwell within the Earthman's brain, an alien tenant that moved Shawn's body at its own enigmatical will. Dimly Shawn was conscious that the *Eagle* was thundering up through Titan's atmosphere, plunging into the depths of space, while his own hands moved swiftly over the controls, guiding the spaceship to its unknown destination!

Very slowly Shawn slipped into unconsciousness. He did not awake till once more the presumptory, wordless whisper shimmered through him. Then his eyes sprang open.

He was still seated in the pilot's chair, and on the vision screen before him was an oddly smooth, regular expanse of dark plain. The curve of the horizon was plainly visible. The *Eagle* had landed on some small planet, an asteroid, perhaps.

How long the journey had taken he did not know. The Sun was a far, small disc, blindingly brilliant despite its distance. This little world had no atmosphere, he realized.

Once more the command came to his brain. Without volition Shawn rose, opened the outer space lock by manipulating a lever in the wall. After a moment he closed it.

Then he swung wide the inner door. On the floor of the lock lay a stone—a jewel, sapphire-red, large as his fist, blazing with angry fires. Shawn stepped forward, picked it up.

And instantly the strange power that had gripped his brain vanished. He stood wide-eyed with amazement, staring down at the jewel in his hand.

THOUGHTS poured in his mind. Intelligent thoughts, clear and lucid as crystal, understandable as a small, cold voice murmuring to him. He knew that the message came from the gem he held.

"Man of Earth, we have a little time now. Yet I must explain to you something of what has happened, so that we may together go toward our goal. You can understand me plainly!"

The red flames swelled within the jewel. Shawn knew before he spoke that the being read his thoughts.

"Yes, I hear you. But I don't understand—"

"Listen, then. We are on a small, airless world in the Asteroid Belt, between

the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. I am one of many like myself who dwell here. We are alive, as you are, but our life is not based on carbon, as is yours. Our bodies are silica—but we are intelligent, far more so than any other race in this System, the great serpents of Titan or the gaseous beings of Callisto. We dwell here, wanting nothing, spending our almost eternal lives in pure thought. We have no need to move about—we neither eat nor reproduce. We have evolved far beyond those things."

Shawn said, "There are many like you here?"

"Very many. And when first these invaders—whom you call the Aliens—burst into this System with their golden fleet, we knew whence they had come, and why. You imagined they sprang from one of our own planets—Mars, or the moons of Saturn. No—they come from another Universe—another plane of space!"

Amazement widened Shawn's eyes, but he said nothing as the thoughts of the living jewel raced on.

"You Earthmen have guessed that there are many dimensions, many space-time continua, impinging on one another.

"A hundred Universes, occupying the same space, yet separated by a barrier—the structure of the atoms themselves, which are different in this continua than in any other. Each Universe has its own pattern, and until recently it has been impossible for the barrier between them to be broken.

"And the Aliens dwell in a dimension impinging on ours, but separated from it by this wall of atomic dissimilarity. Their Universe is old. One by one their stars have vanished, and their Galaxies have expanded into great clouds of radiation, as our own Galaxy is expanding. The Aliens are the last inhabitants of a dead, cold, almost lightless infinity.

"Facing destruction, they sought escape. This we know, for we can read thoughts over vast distances, and we have read the minds of the Aliens. They wished to reach our dimension. In order to do that, they found it necessary to break the barrier between the continua."

The gem was a blinding decade in Shawn's hand. Trying to comprehend the cosmic import of the being's message, the Earthman whispered, "Go on—"

"A piece of iron may be drawn through a membrane by an electromag-

net, thus tearing a hole in that membrane. You could not understand the mechanics of the Aliens' experiment, but I can put it thus: the Earth was drawn through the space-time membrane, opening a gap in the barrier through which the Aliens came into this Universe."

"This hole in space," Shawn said. "Is it still there?"

"No; it closed. But it can be opened again. So I have brought you here with the power of my will. You must take me to the ruler of the Aliens, and I will be able—perhaps—to destroy them and bring Earth back."

"Bring back the Earth?" Shawn's voice was incredulous. "It wasn't destroyed? Life on it—"

"The space-time laws of this alien Universe is different from ours. Earth is in a state of static, frozen, each atom and electron in it standing still. If the planet can be drawn back through the barrier, once more, life will resume again, just as before."

EXULTATION flooded Shawn. He snapped, "Good? Let's start! I'm ready now."

"Let me rule your brain for a minute," the message whispered. "I can set the course—"

Shawn flung open the barriers of his mind, felt the strange power of the living jewel creeping in. Briefly he was unconscious.

He awoke to find himself in the pilot's seat, with the *Eagle* rushing again through space.

On the panel lay the gem, pulsing with red fire.

His thought was distinct.

"Your companions—a girl and three men—were taken to the ship of the Aliens' ruler, which hangs now near Earth's former orbit. They had not known that space flight was possible in this System, and they wish to investigate—to discover if they are in any danger. When they find there is none, they will continue to destroy all life and vegetation on the planets, in readiness for colonization and expansion."

The ship flashed on Sunwards. And carefully, unhurriedly, the living jewel explained to Shawn what he must do, if the Aliens were to be conquered and Earth brought back from the lightless, timeless void of another Universe.

CHAPTER X

THE LAST BATTLE

A GOLDEN spaceship hung motionless against the icy background of the stars, gigantic, terrifying in its huge immobility. The *Eagle*, driving toward it, seemed a midge hovering above a long cigar, so vast was the shining craft of the invader.

From the giant a ray shot out, lancing whitely toward the *Eagle*, catching it like the hand of a colossus. A ray of force, incredibly powerful, that drew the smaller ship toward the larger as though by a contracting elastic band. Shawn grunted, glanced at the automatics in his belt, and absently patted his breast pocket where the living jewel rested. He stood up, went to the space lock.

The stars about the *Eagle* were blotted out by golden walls that closed in relentlessly. Shawn waited till the ship was motionless, and then opened the ports, lowered the rope ladder. He was in a snugly domed chamber, quite empty save for a dozen of the monstrous Aliens who were advancing swiftly toward him.

Shawn went down the ladder, stood quietly, waiting. He could not help wincing as dank, icy tentacles gripped his arm, and fought down an impulse to draw his guns. He let the Aliens tug him forward.

From the life-jewel a message whispered. "Go with them. Make no resistance. . . ."

A door opened in the wall; Shawn was conducted through a vast room where Cyclopean machines hummed and throbbed. Into another room, a small one, they went, and the Earthman went to his knees as the floor drove up suddenly.

He was in an elevator.

The Aliens tugged him erect with eel-like pseudopods. He examined them closely, noticing that each transparent, shapeless body had within it the same dark nucleus, the same filmy tracery of veins.

The elevator passed; Shawn was dragged into another room—a laboratory, he realized. Huge, high-roofed, lit with amber brilliance, the light glistened on equipment whose purposes he could not guess. A deep, broad vat stood

near by, steaming faintly, and heaped carelessly beside it were bodies.

Bodies of snake-men, of the Martians—and here, too, were Shawn's companions! For a dreadful second he thought they were dead, and then realized his fears were unfounded. Tightly bound, Frost and Flynn and Hefley lay quiet and motionless, though their eyes widened as they saw Shawn.

"Terry!" Hefley cried. "They've got you—"

"Pay no attention," came the thought command of the life-jewel. Shawn forced away his gaze, stared before him.

A Martian was bound tightly to a little table, and above his naked body hovered four of the Aliens. One of them, Shawn saw, was much larger than the others. The nucleus within his transparent body was huge.

"He is their ruler," whispered the gem.

Shawn turned sick as he saw what the Aliens were doing. Ignoring the screams of the Martian, they were probing the man's face and head with long needles, from the ends of which wires ran to an enigmatic machine a few feet away. Into the agonized wretch's eyes and mouth and throat the steel points probed, and the needles alternately brightened and grew dull, while from the machine near by a low humming rose and sank.

"They seek to read his mind," came the thought-message of the life-jewel. "Not as we do so, or as the Martians can. But with machines . . . first they torture their victim, so that he will be too far gone in pain to lie to them, even in his thoughts . . ."

THE Martian's shrieks had died to a wordless sobbing. The largest Alien plunged one of the needles directly into the top of the man's head.

The machine burst forth into a shrieking roar. Almost immediately it faded and died, while the Martian went limp.

"They drained his brain of knowledge. The shock killed him . . ."

The Aliens went toward the machine, clustered about it. After a moment they returned, and their ruler turned to Shawn and his captors.

How the creatures communicated the Earthman never understood—by vibration, perhaps. That they could see, Shawn

realized, yet they seemed to have no eyes or organs of vision. The ruler seemed to pause, to consider the new captive.

An Alien dithered up, freed the Martian's body from the table, carried it to the vat and hurled it in. Almost immediately the corpse began to dissolve, while a rank, nauseating stench arose.

The Earthman tensed as he saw the new victim being bound in the Martian's place.

Lorna!

She was unconscious, her white body stark naked, red hair tumbled in ringlets about her bare shoulders. The cords tightened cruelly about her rounded breasts, the soft curves of her thighs—and the ruler of the Aliens turned, went to her side, lifted one of the needles in a transparent tentacle.

Almost Shawn forgot the commands of the life-jewel, for he was sick and faint with the realization of what must come. The message knsed warningly through his brain.

"Wait! Not yet! It is not yet time!"

The pseudopods that gripped Shawn's arms tightened. He stood silently, watching as the ruler brought a needle down until it probed the rounded curve of Lorna's bare breast—pressed it deep!

The girl awoke. She screamed, her eyelids fluttering open, and her form tensed vainly against the imprisoning cords. The Alien withdrew his needle, sank it again in the warm, tender flesh.

The gasping, low sob that came from Lorna's lips drove all thought of caution from Shawn's mind. With a snarling oath he wrenched one arm free, dived for his automatic. He fired it point-blank at the nucleus of the Alien beside him, swung the weapon toward the ruler.

The gun was torn from his hand. He was engulfed in icy, slimy flesh. A tide of horror was creeping up his body, three of the Aliens, gripping his legs and left arm in living steel, sliding up inexorably to overwhelm him.

He heard the thought of the life-jewel.

"Quick! This is your only chance! Do as I commanded—now!"

Shawn remembered. Sanity returned, and he clawed at his breast pocket, ripped it open. The gem seemed to leap into his hand.

"Now! Now!"

A writhing tentacle caught Shawn's arm; he tore it free. With a quick ges-

ture be flung the jewel directly at the ruler of the Aliens—saw the stone drive through the transparent flesh directly into the nucleus of the being—disappear within it!

Shawn felt the cold grip that held him motionless relax. The Aliens fell away, huddled motionless on the floor. Their ruler still stood in a mound beside Lorna, frozen into immobility. Within him the nucleus brightened, was shot with rose-light of angry crimson.

The jewel's message came to Shawn. "Free your friends. Return to your ship. I will guide you. Quickly! My will is stronger than this being's, but I cannot maintain my supremacy too long."

THE Aliens made no move as Shawn sprang forward, unbound Lorna, and with her aid freed Trost, Hefley, and Flynn from their bonds. They eyed Shawn incomprehendingly.

"Terry," Trost gasped. "That red stone—what was it?"

"How did you—"

"No time for talk," Shawn snapped. "Come on!" He led them to the door. Whispering in his brain were the thoughts of the life-jewel, guiding him through the heart of the golden ship.

They passed many of the Aliens, but none moved to molest them. They were frozen into immobility. Shawn could scarcely comprehend the power of a will so vast that it could capture the minds of every Alien in this huge ship. He knew, somehow, that the life-jewel had accomplished that.

They reached the *Eagle* safely. As they looked the ports the brilliant ray blazed out around them, driving the craft into space with giddy impetus. Shawn sat the controls before he turned to the others. Swiftly he explained something of what had happened.

"It's incredible!" Trost said, and Hefley seconded him. Hooker Flynn merely granted, his jaw hanging.

"Not half as incredible as what's going to happen, if things come off as planned," Shawn said. He turned to Lorna, who had wrapped herself in an overcoat she had found in a locker. "How are you?"

"All right, I guess." But she was shivering with reaction. Shawn gave her some brandy and passed the bottle.

"I'm going to look over my motors," Trost said, taking from his pocket the

horn-rimmed glasses, which had miraculously remained unbroken. "Come along, Hooker." The two departed, and Hefley rose to follow them.

"I'm going to catch a nap. I'm worn out. Call me when anything happens."

Shawn nodded, and the little man went out. "How about you, Lorna? Tired?"

But the girl was shaking violently. Swiftly Shawn went to her, drew her close, calming her hysteria. "It's okay now, kid," he said gently. "Buck up. It's all over."

"I—oh, Terry—" Lorna's arms went around Shawn's neck, and, seeing her lips so close, he did the logical thing. He kissed her.

"You know, I think I'm in love with you," Shawn said shakily.

The girl's eyes were very tender. The overcoat gaped open, revealing the curves of her tilted breasts, and Shawn felt their warmth cushion against his chest as he pulled Lorna close, seeking her lips.

An hour later a cry from Shawn brought the others racing into the control room, to follow his gesture toward the vision screen at their feet.

"The golden fleet," Hefley said. "It's coming back."

"At the command of their ruler," Shawn told him. "Actually at the command of the life-jewel that rules his mind. I've learned that the Aliens worship their king as a god—they'll obey him blindly, unquestioningly. If he commands them to restore the Earth—"

The golden fleet was a cloud in space, massed about the great ship of their leader. Abruptly from the craft a mighty blast of light burst, a million rays pouring from the vast assemblage of the golden ships.

"Look!" Hefley's voice was edged with amazement. "Good Lord—look!"

SOMETHING swam into view where the rays concentrated. A tiny point of light, growing larger and larger, seemingly rushing forward with incredible speed. It was large as a grape—a plum—

Two spheres, racing back from the alien dimension, drawn from another Universe by the power of the golden fleet!

Earth and Moon!

Washed in coldy green fire they came, till suddenly the emerald mists dissipated and were gone. The rays flicked out.

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BACK COVER

THRILLING
WONDER
STORIES

